

**with these two hands (build an altar)**

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**Rating:**

Mature

**Archive Warnings:**

Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death

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Gen, M/M

**Fandom:**

僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

**Relationships:**

Midoriya Izuku & Shinsou Hitoshi, Midoriya Inko & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Midoriya Izuku, Yamada Hizashi & Midoriya Izuku, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead/Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Midoriya Izuku/Shinsou Hitoshi, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead & Shinsou Hitoshi, Kirishima Eijirou & Midoriya Izuku

**Characters:**

Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Hisashi, Shinsou Hitoshi, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Yamada Hizashi, Midoriya Inko, Shinsou Hitoshi's Family, Loki (Norse Religion & Lore), Amaterasu, Hakamata Tsunagu | Best Jeanist, Kirishima Eijirou, Bakugou Katsuki, Chisaki Kai | Overhaul

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Vigilantism, Vigilante Midoriya Izuku, Vigilante Shinsou Hitoshi, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Implied/Referenced Domestic Violence, Parental Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, Parental Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Mythical Beings & Creatures, References to Ancient Greek Religion & Lore, Shinto, American Gods Inspired, Villain Midoriya Hisashi, Midoriya Hisashi's Bad Parenting, Angst, Hurt/Comfort, Fluff, Friendship, Quirkless Midoriya Izuku, Midoriya Izuku Does Not Have One for All Quirk, Foster Care, Protective Shinsou Hitoshi, Protective Midoriya Izuku, Homelessness, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead Adopts Shinsou Hitoshi, Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead Adopts Midoriya Izuku, Established Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead/Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Patron Gods, Cheeky Midoriya Izuku, Sassy Midoriya Izuku, BAMF Midoriya Izuku, BAMF

Aizawa Shouta | Eraserhead, BAMF Yamada Hizashi | Present Mic, Yagi Toshinori | All Might Being an Asshole, Quirkless Discrimination (My Hero Academia), Shinsou Hitoshi is a Little Shit, Midoriya Izuku is a Little Shit, Trans Midoriya Izuku, Mass murdering dad club, Slow Burn, LGBTQ Themes, Shinsou & Izuku, Shinsou's foster parents aren't very nice, Canon Rewrite, I'm gonna take canon out back and shoot it, Implied/Referenced Suicide, Parental Hakamata Tsunagu | Best Jeanist, Kirishima Eijirou Has Two Moms, Tags Contain Spoilers, Bakugou Katsuki Redemption, Gore, Body Horror, Heavy Angst, This fic is All Might critical

**Language:**

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Part 1 of [blue sky above, black earth below \(i am here, i am here\)](#)

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# with these two hands (build an altar)

by [Mook\\_aron](#)

## Summary

When Midoriya Izuku finds an altar buried in the woods, he really should leave it alone. It's old and it's faded— the dark stones are weather-worn, pockmarks from the flow of water over time.

An abandoned altar meant gods who had been abandoned.

(And maybe, Izuku finds this too sad to ignore)

With soft fingers and keen eyes, Izuku begins to strip the rocks of dirt and mould. Even though it is evening and the shadows dip low— the altar is warm beneath his hands.

It feels like change.

(American gods inspired au! Updates once a week! Author attempts (and usually fails lmao) to reply to every comment!)

Temporary hiatus yall im tired af

(If you see this fic anywhere else than AO3, it has been stolen! Do not repost my work! If you see this fic posted anywhere else, please let me know!)

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## Notes

Ajajbebe

Welcome to the au that has been dominating my brain for the last week

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# fight, flight, fawn

It has been said before, that not all men are born equal.

There were so many layers to superiority in the human condition—the colour of one's skin, the shade of melanin your birth gave you, the shape of one's nose, the social conditioning attached to the place between your legs and all the things that came with it. The people you love, how many you love, the children you bore or the ones you did not.

The price of a man's clothing, the shoes he wears, the way one walked. Minuscule details of lives that pulled together, cohesive and chaotic in a breath, to form the people we are. An endless checklist of superior and inferior, a way to divide all people, whether it was deliberate or not.

But one thing, so many years after a glowing child was born, stood above the rest.

Quirk status.

In the later years of the 21st century, a child was born who glowed—like he had been dipped into glow stick fluid. In the months and years that followed, a trend arose—quirks. Individual powers that manifested in early childhood, seemingly from an unknown source and then as generations moved along, from genetic inheritance. The evolution of humanity grew larger as time passed, the percentage of those without quirks grew smaller and smaller with each passing year. The year that he was born, it was 20%. By the time he was five, it was radically lower, official numbers coming through at 4.2% of the population of Japan.

Little was known about individual rates in other countries, aside from the US and larger European sections. Many smaller nations had ceased to exist or had morphed into larger unions, civil wars commonplace and it was feared for many years that all out destruction and war would break out at any time.

With the rise of quirks, came moral and ethical issues surrounding ‘bad’ quirks. The continual harassment of some quirk users led to harassment, discrimination and heightened rates of crime. And where there was crime— there were those who would prevent it.

Hero society came out of an era of intense crime and attempted coups, as people sought to cling to some facet of safety— a desperate desire to know there was goodness and that darkness wasn’t going to win.

But with that came the same complex issues that had always surrounded power structures that relied on having power over populations considered to be undesirable. Those in power did not like to yield it, governments that relied on division could not be trusted to pass along power and giving avenues of power to those who lived without it buried inside their genes was a dangerous game— one that could bring even empires to their knees in flames.

*( Their textbooks may talk about a cohesive history but the oldest generations remember a world of ashes and family trees that are decimated)*

*And then, came the gods.*

It was not hyperbole to say that the gods became of great importance over the years. The patron who chose you often dictated your life path — the gods were fickle, even if they were kind. Izuku often wondered what the world would be like if the gods had faded from view, lost in

the background of a world moving too fast to hold onto them.

But hold on they did.

Izuku knows very well that sometimes being quirkless was the lesser of two evils.

Midoriya Hisashi hadn't always been a villain, or even a bad person. Izuku knew his father had grown up happy for a time, a powerful quirk and the ease of life that would have brought— knew he had friends and had fallen in love and loved every moment of his marriage.

He remembers deft hands that tend an altar, kind words cast upwards to a deity that guides his flames to light incense and the glow reflects off of metal and scraps. He knows his father tends to Hephaestus like one does a forge, with constant care and dedication. When he was very young, he would hand Izuku the stick of incense and grin, telling him that maybe he would find Hephaestus as well.

*( Izuku had wanted nothing more)*

*(Now the smell of smoke and ozone makes his teeth hurt)*

But at some point, the things he had gathered in his life had simply been, *not enough*.

Izuku was young when his father first hit his mother. He doesn't remember the moments beforehand well— remembered they were fighting but not what it was about. Just that one moment he was alone on the floor— and then his mother's reddened face was against the floor, a sickening sound that his immature mind had captured perfectly.

“You have no right to ask me where I go. I pay the bills and you both remain safe— that's the deal.”

Izuku has never forgotten the flickers of flames behind dull teeth, the day his father became something other than protector and shifted closer to *predator* .

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If one places a lobster into boiling water, it will leap out. If you slowly heat the water, it will die a slow death.

And slowly, slowly— slowly his father became someone to be feared.

Midoriya Hisashi had not always been a bad person or a villain. But somehow, he became both.

Izuku learned that if he occupied his fathers time, the majority of his ire would be taken out on him— and that his mother would be left alone for the most part. Izuku was an easy target— no quirk meant he had no means to fight back and his father could extend his shame of having a quirkless child into the form of the problem itself.

At some point, his father stopped being ‘dad’ and became ‘Hisashi’.

And to the world, Hisashi became ‘Salamander’.

*( And the mark emblazoned across his father’s lips turns up pale and stark against his skin, the stone altar cracked and burned, the feverish anger of godly rejection burning in Hisashi’s eyes for weeks afterward)*

Izuku remembers every mark— knows that the little crescent on his mum’s cheek is the imprint of a ring ( *knows he has a matching one*) and that the burns across his stomach are ones his mother would’ve worn, if Izuku had not done what was right.

*( And stepping in front of someone bad was **right** . It was all he could do and it would change the very foundations of his story)*

They learn to be quiet in their home.

Their conversations are quiet— far more about their body language than their words. They tend wounds in the cramped bathroom, when the apartment is empty and the scent of ash begins to fade and they do not speak of Hisashi, even in the most abstract of ways.

Inko’s altar gets relegated to their walk in robe, a little white stone with a bell and Inko risks wrath to take fresh flowers on their short walks, washes them in soft water and lays them damp on white stone. Izuku knows she is doing her best to apologise. Aphrodite is a jealous lover.

*( He wonders why a deity of love would let their devotee ever find*



*themselves like this)*

*(He wonders if it is dangerous to hate such a goddess)*

The dark haired man is absent more than he is home as the years pass — he hasn't slept in a bed in the apartment for close to four years— just visits every little while, with words sharp enough to cut and knives to match. He walks through the unit like he owns it ( *he does* ), smelling like fear and anger and *ash*.

The corner where his altar stood is charred and empty.

The day fire licks at his own hands is the beginning of the end. Izuku screams as though the sky is falling, delirious in terror and pain as it consumes layers of skin and leaves him a patchwork of missing skin and purple-red burns. His fire is not meant to sit on his skin, is meant to be free and floating— it is meant to be *free* . And the family altar stones burn into his feet, where he has eagerly climbed to find his patron and instead finds the flames climbing up his nerves like vines along old brick.

*( His mother cannot bear to look him in the face and Izuku cannot bear to look at his hands.)*

*(and izuku will never forget the gleam of poison-green eyes at the sight of the self-caused burns, his mouth a pit of vipers from which only hurt can pour out)*

*(“I always knew you would be like me.”)*

*(But Izuku is quirkless. He has the toe joint— his mother sits at the table, staring at the X-ray print when she thinks he is asleep)*

And one day, Hisashi does not come home.

And instead, a detective in a suit and three armed police crowd their lounge room. A hero sits on their couch— Izuku recognises them even outside of their uniform (and his fingers *itch* to write because Present mic is left-handed and he hadn't ever *noticed* and it changes everything for his analysis) and the man's eyes, while kind, are sharp.

*( He can see their eyes lingering on scars and burns that peek out from the edges of pyjamas)*

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Inko places the tray of tea before them with almost silent movements, the tray barely clicking against the glass tabletop and she takes her previous place on the couch, Izuku curled into her side like a limpet— his green gaze has not left them the entire time his mother has been gone. He would dismiss it as nerves—but he can see the child's hand clenching ever so slightly as he watches their every movement.

He's just arrested the kid's dad but— Hizashi has seen children in this situation dozens of times in his career and something is *off*. He watches them like he is expecting them to lash out, as if that is a norm for his interactions with others. Even after his mother returns to the room, the boy stares and Hizashi can see the wheels turning behind his eyes. The mother too is an enigma— neither of them look shocked in the way families do when they are told a loved one has been arrested. There is no surprise—

“You already knew.”

Midoriya Inko’s hands are clasped in her lap, fingers white with pressure, twisted with the dark fabric of her skirt. They don’t tremble — but it’s a close thing. When she nods, it’s a small movement that seems to take her entire effort. Considering the image of their lives Hizashi’s brain is building for him ( *and fuck if it isn’t making something like rage boil in the bottom of his stomach* ), maybe it does take all of her energy to spit the words out that follow.

“W-we didn’t know he was Salamander. But-” The green haired woman briefly meets his gaze before her attention flicks back to her own scarred hands and then, to her son. To the marks they hadn’t had time to cover properly and marks that haven’t faded throughout the years— there’s a new edge to that green gaze when she turns back. “But my husband has never been a good man, in any way that I know.”

Hizashi can feel the treble of a familiar lightning-gold voice hovering in his bones, a cautious push to *listen* — and when the god of oracles is pushing at you to listen, what man wouldn’t?

It seems that once the green haired woman starts, she is unable to halt the story that spills from her lips. Hizashi is always hit heavily by cases like these, memories of losing his family to a story that ended so much worse than this one that lurk just beneath his calm facade. He finds himself watching the child curled against her side, his tight stare still tense on his face.

When there’s a lurch in the conversation, a lull as Inko runs out of words, the boy finally speaks—

“Present Mic, sir— what’s your patron?”

It comes out in a rush, words tripping over themselves to make themselves heard and the pro watches realisation wash over his features, skin going pale beneath his freckles. It’s not exactly a faux pas to ask for someone’s patron, but it was considered polite to wait until someone brought it up. For some, their patron was a highly private aspect of their being— something reverent.

Hizashi just laughs, tugging at his glove to reveal a claim mark in the shape of golden sun, elegant dark whorls of black shaping a chariot in the centre, dominating his right palm. “Apollo, kourotrophos Apollo to be exact, little listener!”

And it’s a devotion Hizashi takes seriously. He’s devoted a facet of Apollo dedicated to the protection of children— went into his jobs knowing each aspect of career was for the protection of children. He had grown up without that protection— Present Mic was a hero meant to protect them.

His enthusiastic response seems to mollify the young boy, sees the tension leech from white knuckled hands against his mother’s shirt.

“What about you, listener? Are you following Aphrodite, like your mother?” Hizashi instantly knows he’s said the wrong thing, can see Inko’ spine straighten in a split second and her hand finds her sons’ a breath later.

The boy’s eyes are full of *hurt*, sharp and well-known but there is no anger. Hizashi knows why— knows that for a child like Izuku ( *like Hizashi* ) anger isn’t safe.

Inko is the one who answers him, soft and equally as sad, equally

devoid of anger. “My son is godless, Present Mic, sir.”

*Ah.*

Hizashi already knew the boy was quirkless, had read the limited notes he had been given beforehand. A brief description of a family that should've been like any other. A husband who was a businessman, a mother who worked from a home and a thirteen year old son. A nice normal family.

Except Midoriya Hisashi wasn't a businessman.

“I'm sorry to have brought it up, little listener. I didn't know.”

And there's the anger. There's the briefest flash, smothered in moments but Hizashi sees it before it's quashed entirely. He kicks himself mentally— no one liked to be pitied, and he thought he had grown out of pitying kids who couldn't change the hands they were dealt.

“It's fine, sir.”

Hizashi takes it at face value and powers on. “You both deserve to be made aware that Midoriya Hisashi has been arrested on charges of multiple accounts of murder, grievous bodily harm, insurance fraud, embezzlement and associated charges. Unless you decide to press charges, the information you provided tonight will not be added to the charges he is facing.” He pauses, lets a breath build in the silence. “No matter your decision, the charges are serious and he isn't going to get off. But, regardless, the choice is yours.”

The older woman seems to weigh up the decision, holds the heft of it in both hands and nobody speaks in the long minutes she takes. The only sound is the shuffle of papers as the officers bag up the contents of Hisashi's office, an entire paper trail of a life Inko hadn't realised he had been living without them.

“You can add the charges.”

Hizashi only nods, guides her through the process of signing the documents and tries to pretend he doesn't see the way their eyes follow every movement they can see.

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They move a week later, strip the unit of the precious little they hold dear and they leave. Inko calls his school to cancel as they drive away, puts her legal consultations on hold for a fortnight and they move into their new unit the same day they sign the paperwork.

The walls are clean, aged— it's been well used, but there are no burns on the corners. Izuku cannot see the dents in the kitchen tiles, and the balcony is clean, ready for his mother's altar and plant collection.

And there is no one to chastise him, when he pulls the splintered and charred remnants of a familiar white stone altar. There's no heavy hands on their shoulders as they build up what they can as a family.

The white stones make his feet ache, but he crouches before them anyway. There's a chunk of metal melted to the stone, and it glitters underneath the coating of carbon and soot.

Izuku thinks it's okay, if this is the only piece of Hisashi they bring with them.





# Chapter 2

## Chapter Notes

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For once, Izuku thinks he might have a chance at a normal school year. Tokage middle school is not altogether different to Aldera— its the same yellow rendered walls, clean hallways and disordered classrooms. He sees heads peek out of sliding doors, watching him walk behind the homeroom teacher he'd been assigned.

Himura-sensei is young, he thinks. She's taller than average, dressed more casually than he would've expected from a teacher but she seems kind. Her features are soft, relaxed— she's made small talk from the entrance to here, asking little questions about his move and where his last class had been up to in class work, the normal school topics.

*( He knows she knows he's quirkless, can see it in the angle of her hands as she tells him to wait outside the door.)*

There's the scrape of desks against the floor, chairs sliding into place as the woman enters, students greeting her in reply. Izuku hums to himself, almost tuning out the background noise as he amps himself up for the performance of the decade.

He knows he can do this. If he comes out and doesn't stutter and pulls it off and maybe they won't ask about his quirk and he can *finally* be okay.

He's spent years chasing his own shadows, running from heat and flash and *noise* , been the target for so many long years. He wants to be safe here. Home is safe now, his mother is safe now— Izuku wants to be safe *here* .

“You can come in, Midoriya-kun!”

And, its' show time.

He draws a deep breath as he slides the door open and steps through, can feel every eye on him— dissecting him, finding the pieces that are loose, ready to pull apart the threads—

He shakes his head violently, clearing the thoughts from his head like an eraser on a whiteboard. He can do this.

“Go ahead and introduce yourself!” Himura encourages kindly, and he wonders if she can smell his fear.

“I-uh! Hi, I'm Midoriya I-Izuku! I'm t-transferring from Aldera, please take care of me!” He dips his head into a bow, and straightens up. He's managed it— nobody is looking at him oddly, there's a girl in the front who waves a greeting to him and—

“Class, please be aware that Midoriya-kun is quirkless and be careful with your quirks! Make sure he feels welcome and- Midoriya-kun, make sure you come to me with any issues.”

Izuku already knows this year will not go well. There's a familiar glint in the eyes of his classmates, a little shine that has very little to do with being careful and a lot to do with violence.

"I'm going to place you in front Shinsou-kun. Shinsou-kun, please raise your hand."

Izuku can barely see through the blur of his sight, holds onto his composure by threads as a boy with purple hair and his forehead against his desk raises his hand, still face down on the desk.

It feels like a shameful thing, hurrying so quickly out of the limelight of the front of the classroom— feels like there are eyes on him anyway.

So much for new starts.

..◆□□□□□□ ◡ □□□□□□◆..

Shinsou Hitoshi exists in a bubble, Izuku decides halfway through his first week.

There's a sphere of space around the boy— the desks around him are pushed as far as possible. His locker has three empty lockers to either side, his shoe locker has a radius of empty slots radiating out from it.

Most telling of all, nobody speaks to the boy.

Oh, but they have *plenty* to say about him.

He's attempting to eat his lunch, at an empty table— his mother is working directly at the law firm now, and Izuku doesn't really know how she made the bento he is used to. So a half container of rice, peas and a shoddily rolled tamagoyaki dominates his lunch.

He should probably learn how to cook.

When the trio of boys approach his table, he finally lets out the anxious knot that's been building in his chest for three days. He finally knows what to expect.

Except— he seems to have jumped just a little too far forward in his predictions.

“You should stay away from that creep.”

Izuku swallows too quickly around his rice, coughs as it lodges somewhere in his chest and he hurriedly swallows it down. “What?”

The taller of the trio sighs and the flash of sharp teeth glint from his slanted scowl. Izuku thinks his name is Takeda. “The purple haired creep you sit in front of. You'd better stay away from him. He's a *villain*. ”

Izuku wants to tell these boys that he knows real villains when he sees one. He doesn't say it. Instead, he opens his mouth to say something and something *vicious* comes out of his mouth, almost unbidden.

“Does he have a record? O-or are you just a bigot?”

Yeah, he really didn't mean to say it. He's been thinking it the entire time the other student was talking, been dissecting the boy's behaviour from the very moment he's approached him. He looks nothing like Kacc- like *Bakugou* , but they may as well be the same boy, for all that the blond's silhouette fits so well over this dark haired boy's form.

And just like his former bully, the brunette hasn't ever really been challenged on his bullshit. His mouth gapes, and there's a confused, unsteady glance between the boys backing him up. Izuku has gone off script.

“W-what?! That doesn't matter! He's got a villain quirk and that makes him *bad* !”

Izuku watches with caution as Takeda's skin *shifts* ever so slightly out of place, like it's moving independently of the boy's frame. A mutation quirk?

Izuku's bravado is fleeing him, so he summons up the very last of it and holds it warm, *hot* ( *too hot* ) in his chest. It suffuses up his face, and fades as he speaks.

“Sounds to me like you don't really know Shinsou very well. Besides, q-quirks don't make you b-bad-“

There's a vicious smirk ripping across Takeda's sharp toothed mouth, as vitriol spills from his lips. Izuku wonders, in the back of his mind, who had claimed this kid.

“What would you know, you don’t even have one! Useless!”

Izuku flinches back at that, hunches over his lunch and shrinks into the smallest space he can. Whatever had possessed him to talk back has fled him, left him empty and uneasy. So he defaults, pulls out the fawn quaking in bones and lets himself shrink.

“Whatever. Just avoid him. Don’t want to be associated with villains now do you, *loser* ?”

Lunch forgotten on the table in front of him, Izuku watches their receding backs and while he knows he should be keeping his head down, should be flying as low on the radar as he possibly can, he knows he *can’t*.

(It is **right**, to step in front of someone bad.)

Izuku swears to himself that he’s going to do the right thing.

Shinsou Hitoshi is going to be his best friend, whether he likes it or not.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Plan ‘be friends with Shinsou’ has a very rocky beginning.

As in, Izuku cannot find neither hide nor hair of the boy as soon as the

bell rings between classes. One moment the boy is sitting at his desk and when they are dismissed, the taller boy is nowhere to be found.

(It's honestly kind of impressive but it's also *incredibly* annoying.)

Izuku spends precious minutes of his break time scouring the halls, the grounds— even the sports fields, wherever he thinks the other boy might be. He doesn't think the skinny boy would be the type to be sporty but he won't put it past him. He knows how the minds of people who want to hide work, in a way that cannot be taught.

Aside from the disappearing acts, the other student also refuses to talk. He doesn't think Shinsou is mute— he's heard the boy speak in response to questions in class (when he gets called on and it's scarily infrequent, like the even teachers are hesitant to interact with the boy and Izuku's brain buzzes with theories).

( *He thinks the boy must have a mental quirk— something with his voice, something others fear without cause?* )

He draws the line at following the boy after school. He might be curious but he's not *actually* a stalker. Besides, his lunchtime wandering allows him to avoid the open season that the conversation with Takeda seemingly started.

It takes an embarrassingly long time for him to realise he has missed the most obvious space he could check, and Himura-sensei seems to be highly confused when he face-plants his desk out of shame mid roll call.

So when Shinsou disappears in a whirl of movement for the break, Izuku gathers up his lunch and takes it with him. He steadily makes

his way up the stairs, doesn't hurry now that he's fairly sure he knows where his purple haired classmate is.

*( Even if it is vaguely concerning)*

The rooftop is warm and sunny— it's barricaded on all sides by a tall fence, and Izuku flashes back to the newsclips he'd found while researching the school prior to his mum signing him up. He knows a girl had fallen, or jumped or been pushed. Nobody had cared enough to really find out.

Nobody really cared about a godless, quirkless child after all.

Shinsou is sitting against the far wall, eyes shut and he's basking on the midday sun. He reminds Izuku of a content feline, stretched out in the sunlight.

But the door clangs shut behind him, louder with the force of the wind and Izuku is pinned by stark white pupils. He feels like a butterfly, pinned into place.

Izuku has never been cowed by a stare before, so he steps forward.

“Look, whatever it is you want, just get it over with. I know you're new and curious and you probably got dared to do this, so just get it over with. Okay?”

“U-uh-“



“ Stop. ”

There's a fog inside his brain— it feels like his brain is a train of which he is no longer the driver, like he has become the tracks and the metal and the windows and the nails and rivets that hold it all together. He exists for one brilliant, *terrifying* moment as something apart from himself. It's exhilarating and more than a little addictive. He cannot move and he's glad for it, because he would be bouncing out of his bones.

When it fades, he can't contain his glee and he feels like Shinsou is finally on the back foot as he drops down next to him like he hasn't just used his quirk on him without permission. Like they are friends.

(And Izuku wants to be friends)

“C-can you do that again? That was so *cool* please tell me you're planning on heroics that would be the best quirk for underground heroics, you could talk down situations so quickly i can't believe Takeda was trying to make me think you were a villain when you've got so much *potential*! You don't even have a record, do you? Of course you don't-“

He's clearly reached the end of Shinsou's patience at that point and he can see the pure *bafflement* on the teen's face. “Do you ever shut up?”

Izuku smiles widely, the fact that he hasn't been actually rejected yet burning warm in his chest. “Nope-“

And he goes weightless again, disconnects from his brain as something latches to it and he just floats in the space between axons and dendrites that carry thoughts other than his own, lets electrical impulses that aren't his dominate his thought patterns and it's

wonderful.

And when it ends, Izuku grins and reaches for his lunchbox. There's several carefully made onigiri in the box (he'd spent an hour last night trying to make them right),, the best of the attempts he had made that morning. "That's such a cool quirk, Shinsou-kun! I knew my hypothesis was right, it's so nice to be proven correct. It's a response based conditional minx control, right? Does it have to be questions? Can it just be anything requiring a response?"

He thinks he's broken Shinsou for a brief second— his classmate is staring at him like he's never seen him before, like he's never been given a chance. With a sinking feeling, izuku realises that might be the truth.

"Aren't you.. you know, afraid of me? I could make you do *awful* things."

Izuku hums around a mouthful of rice and umeboshi. He swallows the mouthful and licks the grains of rice leftover from his lips without a thought.

"Do you want to make me do awful things, Shinsou-kun?"

The questions might as well have been in Spanish for the blank look it gets him, which Izuku watches transform into a look of confusion which *then* makes him feel like the purple haired teen might've never thought about it that way.

"No, I'd never do that." His voice is aghast, like he's weighed up how it would feel to be so cruel and it's left him shaken up.

Izuku grins happily, tucking the last of his onigiri into his mouth with a satisfied noise. “Well, if you wouldn't do something like that— w-why would I be afraid of you doing it?”

Shinsou looks like his brain is melting out of his ears at this point, and it's odd to see the teen looking so outwardly uncomposed, given his usual unflappable demeanour. He's watched his classmate weather insults and bullying like water off a duck's back—

And a few words of kindness have shaken whatever blase facade he'd built up.

Izuku would be sorry—

But he isn't.

So he smiles just as he's always done in the face of things that should scare him, and holds out a rice ball. “Onigiri?”

With a cautious, somewhat confused look, Shinsou takes one and bites into it with only minimal hesitation.

*Izuku thinks is what victory tastes like on the back of his tongue.*



# Chapter 3

## Chapter Notes

Hope you enjoy this chapter!

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Shinsou goes back to avoiding Izuku almost immediately.

Izuku thinks the other teen thinks Izuku has just filled up his quota of life shattering realisations. He wants to tell the other teen that he wholeheartedly plans on shattering every self built, socially encouraged deprecating thought he has about himself—

But he honestly thinks it's going to be far more entertaining to let Shinsou figure it out for himself.

When he shows up at the rooftop the next day for lunch, his classmate just stares for a long, long minute. Then sinks back against the wall with a sigh that sounds like it should belong to a middle aged accountant with a mortgage to worry about, not a thirteen year old. He says as much to Shinsou, and he's not anticipating the huff of quashed laughter that breaks through his tired fugue.

“I knew you c-could laugh!!”

Purple eyes narrow at him, like he's trying to be intimidating. And he

probably would be, to most people. He's mastered that dead-eyed glare that Izuku's seen on the face of pro's, obviously well practiced and oft used.

"Shut up, Midoriya."

( *Izuku is not 'most people'* )

Izuku shakes off the glare like it doesn't even register on his radar and can't help the laugh that bubbles up in response. The rooftop is warm, a light breezing curling over the high fences as Izuku chokes a little on his lunch and for once it's not nerves breaking up his speech but the giggles he's trying to keep under wraps.

"Ah-hah! You know my name, I-I knew you did. Just a-admit it, you d-don't hate m-me."

"You're pushing it."

Izuku holds the sound of that huff of laughter close to his chest the entire time through lunch, offers a rice ball to his classmate and grins shakily as Shinsou's shoulders slump. He takes the food with no fight to it, and Izuku counts it as a win.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Life is different, without the heavy threat of Hisashi hanging over them.

They keep the windows and blinds open, there is colour on the walls and Inko finds old paintings on the roadside. Cleaned, they sit on the walls like windows into a world they had previously been closed off from.

Izuku has a bedspread he hasn't seen before—it's an older one, probably no longer in production but when his mother hands it to him with a soft smile, Izuku instantly understands. Present Mic's face beams up at him from the bottom edge of the cover, a splash of colour on a pale but warm grey fabric.

Izuku feels like he's betraying his life long idolisation of All-Might, a man chosen by Amaterasu herself! But—

It feels petty to think of.

But All Might had never saved him. The larger-than-life hero hadn't appeared in his lounge, with the keys to his freedom held between gloved hands and handed them over willingly. Hadn't been another hero, tucked into the background of the hero fight— a man with red eyes and a vicious tilt to his mouth, like he knew what kind of man Midoriya Hisashi was— like he had been there to *avenge* .

Izuku's spent the last three weeks poring through every scrap of information there is on Present Mic. He's seen his arrest records and his villain capture counts and he knows the voice hero is well known for cases involving families. He just hadn't realised how *many* . One would think he specialised in those cases with his records.

But koutrophos Apollo was a protector of children, so it was probably a pull from his deity. Izuku wondered, in some abstract sense, what it would be like to experience that. He had no deity pulling on his mind towards the things they wanted done, nothing shaping his actions or

his life, aside from his own two hands.

He wondered what it was like, to have that fall back to rely on— a deity was always there, hanging in the back of the mind. They could pull you one way or the other, could be beseeched for guidance and prayed to for support.

There were cases of quirkless people being bestowed with the ultimate gifts— quirks. It was rare but some deity's would grant their loyal followers quirks when they had need. For the few years after the disaster trying to find his patron, he had held out hope. Now—

Now Izuku is ambivalent.

He won't be, *cannot be* content in this world about this but he has no choice. The world will never favour him, it will never rush to fulfill his dreams or coax him higher into greatness. The only heights he will reach are the ones he reaches on his own strength. For the most part, he has become used to it.

He's out of chances, for the most part. He thinks he'd like to find a way to help people— maybe he would pursue law like his mother or nursing or engineering.

( *He wants to be like **them*** )

That's not really in his future anymore and he thinks that's okay.

It has to be enough.



( *It has to be.* )

So Izuku lets himself love his heroes— knows that at least one stranger had wanted to protect them, save them— without even knowing them, Present Mic had given Izuku's life a way to move forward.

..◆□□□□□ □ □□□□□◆..

He's grateful that his school is so stringent against physical bullying, and aggressive quirk use. He's tired of having to hide injuries and it's a wonderful sort of freedom to know he doesn't need that skill anymore.

The school can't control the verbal bullying nearly as well as they can the physical aspect, which is really such an oversight on the behalf of the administration. The staff couldn't be everywhere, and teenagers with a mob mentality just aching to target the 'lesser' among them?

Yeah, that was just begging for a fight.

It doesn't take for it to become apparent to Izuku, but Shinsou doesn't bring lunch. He doesn't ever produce a bento, or wrapped sandwiches or even raw fruit— the only times he sees his (friend? Are they friends?) *classmate* eat is when Izuku brings rice balls to share— he doesn't even have those cheap jelly packs!

If Shinsou notices the amount of shared snacks double after this

realisation, he doesn't bring it up and Izuku is content to ignore it as well.

Still, it raises questions for him and Izuku has never been very good at keeping his nose out of the business of others. At least he has subtlety firmly in his skill set.

Izuku waits until his classmate is halfway through his half of the rice balls, filled with salmon and furikake today as a flavour experiment. He had discovered very quickly that Shinsou detested wasabi and bitter, spicy flavours with a passion— it had been the most animated he'd seen the other teen. Izuku grinned at the memory of Shinsou trying to *wipe* the flavour off of his tongue to little effect.

“So, wanna tell me why you don't have any lunch?”

Izuku expects snark, he really does. The open, raw honesty Shinsou meets his gaze with hits like a lead weight in Izuku's stomach.

“Foster family didn't give me any.”

Izuku blinks, slowly.

It takes long seconds to compute in his mind, brain slowly putting little things together. It was like he had been solving a puzzle with no reference image and Shinsou had just handed him the box cover, the full picture spreading out like a map before him.

“They... didn't give you any?”

His classmate— actually no. This is his friend now, because Izuku is not going to stop until he's fixed this. He's out of his depth— he knows nothing of foster care, only that they are meant to take *care* of children.

(Izuku doesn't think refusing children food is *care* )

But he's going to fix this, somehow.

Shinsou is nodding his head, calmly— like this is just business as normal. Izuku really, *really* hopes it isn't.

“Not today, no.” He pauses, blinks like he's realising what he's saying. “It really is fine, Midoriya. It just happens sometimes.”

Far from soothing his worries, Izuku finds himself increasingly worried for Shinsou. But—

He remembers adults who would ask questions, *push* until it felt like too far and Izuku would shrink back. Maybe he could tell them but they didn't take notice of his 'no' either, so what was the point? He could push Shinsou into telling him everything— let him spill out his pain by force and drag him to the police.

The police who would shake their head and deny them information, assured that their parents were kind and that they were just troublemakers. Izuku knows how the world works.

So he smiles, let's the worried look fade away and firmly tucks away his indignant anger until he knows which path to unleash it along.

His palms are burning hot— not with pain but with a heated tingling, almost pleasant to his mind. It was gone as soon as it had come, like a phantom sensation along his skin. He rubs at his hands as he dives back into the conversation-/ well, it's half of a conversation that Izuku provides 90% of the content for and Shinsou replies with short sentences and tentative grins.

Izuku doesn't want to risk his friendship with Shinsou, because it wouldn't be the right thing. Finding an *actual* way to help his classmate is the right thing to do, so Izuku grins in reply to a quip Shinsou drops suddenly and lets himself laugh, subtly pushes the rice balls between them closer to Shinsou.

His mother is going to love Shinsou.

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Finally granted free rein of the world around him, Izuku finds himself wandering the streets in the hours between the final class bell and the setting of the sun, and this afternoon is no different.

He sees Shinsou feeding cats near an underpass, pulling a can of food out of his backpack and carefully emptying it where it's safe for the tabby cat to eat. He doesn't say anything to his friend— just wonders idly how anyone who had ever taken more than a glance at Shinsou Hitoshi could ever think him capable of cruelty.

Izuku answers his own question inwardly. No one has ever given Shinsou Hitoshi more than a passing glance, never given him a *chance* to prove who he was.

He gives the purple haired teen his privacy when he sees him that day and keeps wandering. His mind is quieter today, less static-buzz and more a low hum of background noise. It's nice to walk and walk even further, stretch his legs and just *move* .

He thinks better like this, when his feet are already moving so he doesn't need to squander energy being frustrated by legs that jitter under his desk unbidden. His brain is soothed by the steady rock of moving, that anxious rush of muttering and overthinking held at bay.

The sun is still soft blue when he finds himself at the edge of a familiar woodland. He recognises this place he thinks, for all that he hasn't been here in almost a decade. The chain link fence sags sadly, rusted and old— the old factory it used to proudly encircle lies abandoned. There's colourful splashes of graffiti decorating the gutted concrete structure— some of the pieces are actually nicely done.

He looks off, down the small incline he knows leads to the creek— and his feet are moving before he registers it. It's like something is pulling him along by the hand, just for a moment and he trips as the sensation passes, his skin left cold in its wake. He's ducking under branches and following a trail that's still obviously followed by children these days from the state of the bare dirt beneath his shoes.

The trunk bridge has since collapsed— there's only a half rotted section of it laying against the creek bed, green with moss. The sky is growing gold at the edges, birds overhead heading to roost and woodland comes alive as the first tinges of dusk begin to colour the world, and Izuku stands in the clearing with a sense of déjà vu that takes his breath away.

He can almost see Kac— can see Bakugou, his carmine gaze wide and vibrant and *happy* , and remembers his face twisted in confusion. Before people who had known *better* had *taught* Bakugou to be angry.

Izuku doesn't know why he's here. This isn't a happy place, by any stretch of the imagination. He doesn't want to be here, but he is— the dirt is coating his shoes, and the calm of the clearing is too much to resist.

He finds himself crossing the creek with hesitant movements across slippery rocks, scrambling easily up the sides in a way his younger self had never been able to. His younger self hadn't been able to do a lot of things, Izuku thinks absently.

It's odd, to picture himself in this place, the moments before life changed and nothing could ever be the same, when *Izuku* could never be the same. It's an odd thing, to wonder who he would be if things were different. If he had had a father who left quietly in the night and decided to move on-

But the thought hurts in a way that feels too much like fire on his skin, so he turns away from it and physically shakes himself to avoid it.

There's a platform of stone sticking out of the hillside, he notes with curiosity. It looks-

It's white stone, worn rough with time and water— Izuku can see the dip where dripping water has worn a well in the stone. Moss clings to the edges, grows dark and green and verdant over what can only be an altar.

Izuku knows the altar is not his— it is not anyone's, to have been left this long and in such a state. Nobody has tended the altar in a long time, left it to rot in dirt and muck.

Izuku knows this means the altar is abandoned, that it belongs to a deity that has been cast aside and forsaken. He shouldn't touch it, should let nature reclaim the stones and let them sink into the hillside.

But—

Izuku knows a little about being cast aside himself, knows how it feels to be regarded as something the world expects to fade away without a word. The quirkless were rejects of evolution, the last desperate dregs of lesser humans that are better off left in the past. Society wants them gone— lets them be subsumed by discrimination and harassment and suicide rates that climb dizzyingly high, like the hillside swallows the altar.

Izuku knows what it is to be forgotten.

(And this is the **right** thing)

So he clears away the foliage and the weeds, kneels in the dirt and begs his mother's forgiveness in advance for the stains he's leaving on his uniform. He peels off the moss in dark strips and leaves them in piles in the hillside, scrubs at the dirt with his hands, pours water to reveal glittering white stone beneath the dirt layer. The sun begins to fall, the shadows dipping lower as he works and evening encroaches.

And the stone is warm beneath his hands as he rests his hands on the clean rock— *too warm* .

For a moment, burning heat licks at his feet and hands, the phantom pain of burns that have faded into whorls of scar tissue.

And something in the shadows of the hillside speaks, low and soft.

*“You summoned me?”*



# Chapter 4

## Chapter Notes

Posting early since I won't be available this weekend! Enjoy :)

So someone brought up a question I've been expecting to a little while: why have I mostly focused/brought up Greek deities so far when they're all Japanese characters! I replied to them but thought this might be good information for everyone as well :)

So there is a bunch of associated lore that I've written that will come up through world building as we go BUT:

Deities are not geo-locked in their historical areas of worship. So far we've seen three Greek gods, and one Japanese deity, but there are a myriad of other religions that will feature.

A lot of areas of countries become concentrated with certain religious sects— Musurafu in this au has a larger Greek deity devoted population, which places it as a 'focus' centre for Greek gods so the children living there are more liking to be chosen by Greek deities than other pantheons.

A lot of is to do with emigration patterns over time, some parts of japan (Kyoto for example) are still heavily Shinto focused due to historical ties and a lack of outside emigration, so the population of the area is mainly devoted to Shinto pantheons.

It can also be a family tradition type thing, where deities may continue to claim all members of a family. The todoroki family will be an example of this in the future!

So yes— a large variety of pantheons will be featured! It's important to realise that deity worship in this mha au hasn't died out like it has in a lot of places in our world and has had a lot more time to develop, spread and use modern means of communication, spread and outreach to reach different places of the world!

On claiming and marking from deities!

So: claiming is the first step of a deity-devotee bond. It's usually done and finished when they are young children— we see an attempt vaguely described in the first chapter, when Izuku burns his hands when presented to the altar to see if a deity speaks for him. It's a social thing to be claimed. It's much like quirk status—it's listed on paperwork, kids will talk about them and compare and brag.

A mark is a secondary step most devotees are given at some point between the ages of five and twelve. It's outward sign of a 'bond' between a deity and a devotee, and a way for others to recognise their patron without asking.

There's another step above a marked devotee— a Chosen. And it's been hinted at once, though I'm going to keep that as a surprise for later!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

**“You summoned me?”**

Izuku would like to say he reacts calmly to the sudden words, the hush of unnatural quiet that falls over the woods, to the cold wind that brushes against his ankles so suddenly.

Instead, he has to live with the embarrassing fact that he screams in fright, high and shrill. He jumps, landing a few feet back at the edge of the creek banks and eyes the darkness that lounges like a house cat against the hillside where the altar had been buried with trepidation.

Izuku is *fucked* .

He's touched the altar of an unknown god without permission and he's

really messed up, if he's warranted a visitation.

And that's what this is.

He's heard enough about them— when little tendrils of the gods would appear in their realm, sneaking out of cracks in reality. They visited to wreak destruction, to mete out punishment, to bless their chosen in the best of ways. In some way, Izuku has warranted a visitation and it's not a good thing by any measure he can think of.

The shadow is watching from its perch, looking as smug as a featureless voice can possibly be. It is waiting for a response. Izuku's throat is dry.

"I- I did not mean t-to!" He manages to squeak out, too busy trying to figure out how to get out of this to be mortified at how his voice breaks twice.

He squirms as he *feels* the deity cast its gaze over him, tracing his form languidly. **"No, you did not. How curious, that someone devoted to my name does not know it."**

Ice filters up from his toes, sticks his feet to the ground and brooks no escape, He has misheard, he thinks. He doesn't have a devoted god, he has no path that way— surely a god would know these things.

"I'm n-not devoted to a-anyone. I was never claimed— I'm G-godless, I h-have no c-claim." *It's cruel to do this* , cries the part of his brain that has no self preservation even when confronted with the shadow of a god. It rages against false hope, tears down any hope that builds in the

shadows of his chest. ‘ *Hope is dangerous!* ’ It cries again, and Izuku must agree.

Hope was a dangerous thing for a boy like him to hold onto.

That cold gaze, cast by no visible eyes but Izuku knows that the god is watching, is tracing his face. There’s a reverberation in the air, a light noise that Izuku realises is a laugh stretching through the clearing. It does not sound ethereal or divine— it sounds like the man in his street, who laughs at the cats near his shop when they chase up and down the street. It’s such a human sound that Izuku feels oddly... off guard.

**“And yet, my claim is on you. You have no mark, indeed— but listen well, Midoriya Izuku:”** There’s a pain unlike anything Izuku has felt in years, so hot that it is bitterly painful and the scars on his hands twinge. Izuku remembers vividly as his hands burned against the stones and only now does he realise that it had been an inferno that seared his skin.

**“To be claimed by me is to be hated. I am Oathbreaker and being devoted to me will bring nothing but ruin to your life.”**

That gaze returns to his form and Izuku feels like he is being appraised. He is still locked in place, *frozen* — he wants to rush forward, he wants to flee the clearing.

Something else makes him stay.

The voice is cold, cold and aching and old— but above all, it is *sad* .

Izuku cannot help but wonder how long it has been since this god had been spoken to, how long his altars had been forgotten across the world, if he was a shadow in the world because so few chose to see his form.

Izuku wonders if he is like his own altar, worn down by time and lack of care.

(Izuku should do the **right** thing)

“I-“ His voice is soft, dry and it feels like his thoughts are going to bubble out of his throat like a torrent. The sun is sinking lower, and lower still on the horizon— he’s going to be late home no matter how fast he runs now. His mother will be home from work now— will she be worried yet? His phone is still and silent in his pocket, so he doesn’t think she is yet.

He thinks about what he is offering here, what his words could mean over and over inside his mind.

“I-I know a l-little a-about being hated a-already...” He glances down at his hands, traces the edges of the burns there with a careful eye. “Are these your claim m-marks?”

There’s a pregnant pause, a thundercloud that roils in the air and there’s a tension in the air that Izuku cannot put a name to. The air is cold, his breath puffs in shuddery clouds of white air on every exhale, for all that it is summer.

It is an intensely off putting experience to feel like you are being

watched by something you cannot see properly, Izuku is starting to realise. It's not like the feeling of someone watching you in a crowd, or the cold prickle of an animal watching you from the shadows. He feels as though he is being measured against an unknowable yard stick, something behind his own understanding.

There's a hum of noise, a deep buzzing that sets his teeth on edge when it rumbles through the ground. **"You could say they are the first of my claims, if that is what your mortal mind finds comforting."**

Izuku feels turned around at every turn in this conversation, like he has no anchor point. Most children his age have spoken at least once to a patron, even if it was just at the time of the claiming. Izuku has never felt this— the sharp, heavy appraisal of a being far beyond his comprehension. "Do you i-intend to mark me?"

The being laughs once again, cold and low.

**"Like all mortals, you know not what you ask of me. No, Midoriya Izuku—"** the noise that rumbles from the altar shadow is a sound of cracking earth, the rumble of the noiseless, mouthless voices of the dead in their earth far below. Frost climbs the grass and leaves the curling ferns dead and desiccated in its wake. **"My mark brings only sorrow. Do not return here, I do not wish to lose another devoted to my curse."** The voice pauses, a strained tone taking over as it continued. **"Allow me to be forgotten, child."**

The silence rings louder than anything in its suddenness, the rumbling gone as if it had never begun in the first place. The shadows are light against, the air muggy and warm against his cool skin— the altar is cold to the touch once again.

For all the world knows, nothing has changed. There are patches of deadened foliage as the only remnants of the encounter.

And Izuku should be terrified— and he is. His legs are barely holding him, rooted to the same spot he has been the entire time and his knees shake so badly he wonders if this is where the phrase ‘knees knocking in fear’ comes from. He feels like ice and stone bind him to earth, as if he had become part of the clearing.

He is terrified, yes.

But something burns in his veins, a righteous indignation and frustration he cannot find the root of in his chest. This deity— he admits his scars are in some way originated from him, that it was a claim in all but name.

Izuku has been fed a lie from a deity meant to give him guidance and he cannot halt the bitterness sitting on the back of his tongue. It is hot and heavy, weighted like lead sliding down into his gut. He has been living a lie, all this time.

He hadn’t needed to suffer so half as much as he has and the realisation is ash in his mouth, bitter bile that washes up and up into his throat. He wants to rage and and scream and he wants to cry about how cruel this feels.

And yet—

Izuku still wants to fix that cold, aching emptiness that has passed through him in that split second the deity’s mind had touched his

own. He wants to fix this, in the same yearning pull he feels when he sits next to Shinsou and eyes the darkness under his eyes and the way his uniform drapes a little too loosely around his form.

Izuku is well aware his penchant for fixing things gets him into trouble, it has *always* gotten him in trouble.

(He will do what is **right**)

Izuku flees from the clearing like a fox from the hounds, backpack dangling from one hand and he ignores every buzz of his phone in his pocket in favour of pelting home. He wants to go home and stop thinking about how a large chunk of his life is a lie, that half of his pain has no true reason except that a deity didn't want to give him a 'curse' and instead Izuku's life has built its own curse in its place.

There's something poetic to be said, he's sure— but Izuku isn't a poet and he doesn't want to wax on about how ironic that concept is. He could say it's a fated thing— a patron who refused to claim him, and in doing so brought about the very curse they sought to avoid.

But Izuku thinks none of these thoughts.

Izuku has a panic attack on his doorstep instead.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Midoriya Inko has always wanted to be better.



She knows she's failed.

It's a fact that sits heavy around her throat, a chain that ties her down into the mire of her guilt. It tightens like a noose around her airways when she sees her son, too quiet— it becomes a stranglehold at the glimpse of waxy skin turned red with heat.

Inko has always wanted to be better, but instead she's raised a child in a place that has destroyed a part of him she barely even knew existed before it was gone.

Inko hates that there is a part of her that longs for those early days, when Hisashi was kind and loving, before—

Before what?

Before Hisashi was Salamander? Inko scoffs at herself, places a soapy dish into the draining rack with a little more force than necessary and reaches for the next with hands that feel angry even to her. Hisashi, Inko knows and wants to deny with all her heart, was always Salamander. She just hadn't wanted to know, had blinked away the evidence because the truth was too hard to breathe into life, to put into words.

By the time she had been willing to look, it had been too late.

Inko has already failed at being better, at being more than she had been given as a child. So really—

She has nowhere else to go but up.

She flinches a little as she places yet another plate down a little too hard, the crack of crockery against crockery a sound that brings far darker thoughts to light. Somehow, it is easier to escape the thoughts of their past than it is to escape her own guilt.

They may never see Hisashi again—

But Inko will see him everyday in the edges of the son *they* ruined, because Inko has let this happen and she will never be able to take it back. Oh, she knows she's not the main cause of it— far from it. She's done her best to shield her son and she's worked hard to make herself acknowledge that.

But she got them into this mess, and she hadn't been able to pull them out and the thought *rankles*.

But— they've both built themselves apart from that. There is the Inko and the Izuku who go outside, who smile and laugh and do not talk about Hisashi, and the life they have lived with and without him. There is the Inko and the Izuku who live in between these walls, quiet and soft and learning how to be real, how to be the people they were *outside* .

( *Slowly, her son is learning who he is outside of fear* )

There's a scrabbling at the door, like the sound of a key but the lock doesn't turn over and the knob doesn't turn. Inko dries her hands, knowing Izuku is probably behind the door and has his hands too full to open it, but too stubborn to put it down.

She turns the lock from the inside and pulls the door open, expecting to see her son standing there—

But he's not.

Izuku is curled against the door frame, wheezing like he has forgotten how to breathe and his face is ashen white beneath a flush of exertion. For a long moment, Inko looks for blood.

It's a moment that passes in a flash, the light from the entryway spilling across his form and she sees no injuries. But—

Her son is heaving into the frame his arms form, tight shuddering breaths and sobs that rock through his body like she hasn't seen since he was a young child. Before her son had learned to swallow his tears and step directly into danger just because he thought that was what he was *meant* to do.

*( inko doesn't know how to tell him that's not how people live, that he isn't meant to do what is right all the time but—*

*The words always slip away when she reaches for them, when she sees that her son will never understand that he doesn't have to save everyone )*

Inko reaches out towards her son, hands slow and gentle. She doesn't speak immediately— he knows she is here, eyes locked into hers with a keen clarity. She waits for the first flinch, the inevitable reaction to contact her son gives— even to her.

But she barely has time to blink before his hands are around her middle and his face, blotchy red from crying and drawn taut with stress disappears against her chest. He tucks himself against her like he can't bear to be anywhere else, as if he is hiding away against her.

She remembers this.

An older memory, of a much smaller child and a younger mother, tucked into the edge of their old kitchen. The first time Hisashi had hit her, he had left directly after, whiskey hot and sour on his breath. And Inko had gathered her terrified son into her arms, and dialled a number she had promised to never call again.

("P-papa?"

"Inko."

"I-I... I need help. I need help now."

A deep sigh, and a voice that exhaled roughly like a chainsmoker on their last dart answered her.

"I don't have time for this, Inko. "

)

She remembers the day she decided to leave and the day she realised that there was no one to reach out to.

She feels the chill of a whisper on her mind, the soft drag of a hand in her memories. It is a fragment of a softer time, and it springs to mind with the gentle touch of her patron. She is reminding her, that her love hadn't been at fault for so much pain in its wake.

*(It is not a lesson that has stuck but She is a patient teacher)*

Dinner is half done on the stove but Inko dismisses it out of mind in favour of getting her son up on his feet.

She wonders, as she pulls her bleary eyed son through the doorway and towards their couch, what life would've been like if her father had made time, just once in his life, for his eldest daughter.

But settling in on the couch, her son heavy against her side with a sleepy weight, Inko knows that her father has never had time for a child, let alone four. No, she muses, sweeping the hair back from Izuku's face with a shaking hand—

Not even her father could have fixed Inko's mistake.

She always has been her fathers' daughter.

## Chapter End Notes

Probably not where you expected this chapter of go, huh!

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# push and pull

## Chapter Notes

Yet again an early post, as I have to work all weekend and I don't want to forget to post! I hope you enjoy this chapter and that those celebrating Easter this weekend enjoy it!

Here we have some excellent friendship and relationship building, specifically between Inko and Izuku! It might be less intense chapter but— all of these scenes tie into a plot I swear!

Remind to Come yell at me:

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It's almost midnight when Izuku stirs, his light dozing broken by a sudden noise from the television, filling the lounge room with a soft blue-light glow. It reflects off the glass coffee table and the glass fronts of the picture frames he can see. It bathes their home with a softness that transcends physical light— it makes him feel *safe*.

His mother is sleeping, head slumped against the back of the couch but she stirs as he shifts, eyes gritty and mouth cottony, dry with sleep. He steps up from the couch, legs wobbly and his head is dizzy from the sudden rush of blood to his head as he does so. He braces himself on the arm of the lounge and makes his way to the kitchen.

There's a half cooked dinner on the stove but he can't muster up the energy to feel guilty— he can't muster up the energy to feel anything at this point.

He shifts his weight to lean on the bench, head pressed to the cool

tiles of the kitchen tiles. He fills a glass of water, and after a moment of thought, a second one and takes both back to the lounge room on quiet feet.

His mother takes the glass with a steady hand and Izuku sighs as the water washes the acrid tang of a dry mouth away. They sip their water in a stifled silence, neither willing to broach the topic quite so soon after waking.

Instead, Izuku watches the news that plays silently on the television, watches the emergency broadcast that washes over the screen before his eyes. There's a villain attack in Jaku— a group of villains with aggressive quirks holed up in a bank, holding the bank tellers inside at gunpoint. Izuku had always thought the concept of 24/7 banks was practically encouraging villains to attack but convenience always seemed to win out over logic when it came to money.

He watches a hero he doesn't recognise literally crashes in, though the running update feed helpfully informs him that 'PRO HERO SHATTERPOINT HAS ARRIVED ON SCENE' and the pale face of a reporter ducking away from the plume of debris and dust. Izuku clicks his tongue at the new hero's blatant disregard for the safety of the news crew and the small crowd that has formed outside the police barrier.

He wants to say that the new hero's skill makes up for his flashy entrance and the risk of injury to the civilians around the bank—

But it doesn't.

His quirk seemingly affects the air around him, a harsh visible haze—Izuku can't figure out if it is heat or the air vibrating around his form. He gets his answer when the man braces a hand against the



supporting wall of the bank's front foyer and with the screech of cracking concrete, the building warps before his eyes. He sees a villain flung against one wall and then shifted up once more, another clearly terrified as the walls enclose in on him.

But Izuku sees the wide gaze of a teller, trapped indiscriminately alongside his villain captor and izuku *aches* at the sheer terror in his eyes. Fear of a *hero* , who had caused more damage than the villains in the first place.

Izuku looks—

Izuku begins to *see* .

He doesn't know what he's seeing, not yet. There's a frame filling with colour in his mind, a picture amassing with every new piece of information he feeds into and Izuku—

Izuku is scared of what the full picture is going to show him.

The television clicks off suddenly and he jerks back to the present, to where his mother is pressing a soft hand to his cheek like she's already attempted to get his attention with words and her face is lined with worry. Stress hangs about her shoulders like a cloak, drags the lines of her body down to the ground like heavy weights are guiding her there. Her mouth is twisted, lips sealed tight and a tinge of grey everpresent on her lips.

She looks exhausted and Izuku hates that he is the reason she looks so tired.

*(Anyone with a quirkless, **godless** son—*

The errant thought sends a frisson of panic through his body, tense and tight. Not godless—

### ***Abandoned .***

Izuku has been abandoned by his deity and the thought stings sour and acidic in his mouth, bitter-rooted anger heavy in his bones.

His mother feels him tense, ducks her head to meet his gaze and her eyes are wet, for all that her hands are steady at his face.

“Izuku, baby... What happened today?”

Izuku hiccups on a laugh, bordering on hysteria once again. What happened today?

“D... I-I cleaned an altar out in the woods because it... it was the **right** thing to do and I...” He gulps down the remaining fear, bites down on the tears. “Something visited.”

His mother’s hands tighten on his own, bordering on painful as her nails dig into his skin. She brings his hands up to the light, traces his wrists and his fingers. She is searching for a cursed mark, searching for the grey ash of godly anger on his skin.

“Izuku...”

She seems to find nothing on his hands and her gaze is scared in a way he hasn't seen for a long time and his chest fills with a tight emotion he can't describe, except that it makes his ribs ache. He looks down at his hands, white under the pressure of his mother's hands, anywhere to avoid that look in her eyes.

"Did..." He chuckles wetly— it's not a happy sound. "D-did you know that a deity can c-choose to abandon a devotee w-without giving them a m-mark?"

He wipes at the dripping of his nose, at the corners of his eyes where his frustration has condensed and burns like it's *sacrilegious* to cry over something a deity has done. "C-cause I know. I know that *now*. "

"Oh... Oh Izuku..."

Maybe it's the way her hands soften around his, one leaving that embrace to curl at the base of his neck. Her skin is cold but familiar, the soft wax-sensation of the burn on her left palm a reminder. Maybe that's part of it—

Maybe if Izuku had been claimed, had been *enough* then—

Maybe his father would've been a better man, a *different* man at the very least. Then again, Izuku had always thought being abandoned would be less painful than being stuck with his father, and thought that the pain of being left behind could never compare to the feeling of his skin melting beneath a crooked mouth and crooked hands.

Instead, the anger he has never dug up in mind over his father pales in

comparison to the cold, hot inferno of betrayal.

It shouldn't be logical, to feel like this over a deity he has never known, has conversed with once and he doesn't even know *who* he had spoken to on that hillside. It makes his head feel like it will split at the seams of his skull, that his ribs are being wreathed in something hotter than fire—

His anger burns cold and he wonders how long it would've taken him to realise that his sorrow and his anger and his emotions were not *meant* to be ice in his lungs.

*(He remembers ash upon on grass, the heat that decayed ferns and left the air cold in its wake)*

*(He does not dwell on how familiar it felt)*

“That day... at the altar...” His mother's voice is quiet, soft in the way that they've learned questions should be asked. There's no one left to admonish them but still, this is their way. “That w-was the claim?”

The fingers of her right hand trace, absently, the scars of the burns set in raised whorls on his palms. He can feel the pressure of her touch reflected in the muscles of his hands and the sensation makes him twitch. The tracing stops.

Izuku nods, finally directing his gaze back to her mother's face and though he knows she's crying, the expression on her face is indescribable. Izuku doesn't know the name of the burning in her eyes, can't categorise the answering burn in his chest. “He... he said I could call them his claim marks, if that was the... the truth that gave me comfort.”

The living room is quiet, the ticking of the clock and the uneven whirr of the overhead fan the only sounds to accompany this quiet, tiny drama of their mortal lives.

“Does it give you comfort, son?”

Izuku eyes the glow of the streetlights through the balcony glass and the sickly tinge of yellow it bathes the living room with, traces the familiar sensation of scar tissue beneath numb fingertips and breathes out air he has held in his lungs for far too long.

“I don't know. I really don't know.”

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Walking through the gates of Tokage junior high is like walking through a gate into another world, izuku thinks tiredly, stifling a yawn behind his hand. He's been yawning ever since he crawled off the couch to get ready for school, the meagre three hours of sleep not nearly enough after the exhausting mess of the previous day and his jaw hurts from the strain.

It almost feels like the previous day hasn't even happened— nobody knows that Izuku's world has been turned on its axis in seconds, that nothing is as it was.

(The incense he stuffed at the bottom of his backpack feels like it's burning a hole in the fabric)

*(He's going to do what is **right** )*

Shinsou is slouched next to his shoe locker, and Izuku crouches down next to him to retrieve his indoor shoes, carefully checking for tacks and pleased to see them untouched. His actual shoe hole is on the other side of the entrance but— Izuku knows how the little things build in their loneliness.

Besides, there are so many empty spaces around Shinsou and Izuku plans to fill as many of them as he can, as many as the other teenager will let him take up.

“They did mine this morning.”

Izuku jerks his gaze up to meet Shinsou's, and then back down to his shoes, peering to see if his friend is carrying his weight oddly. Shinsou laughs a little— an ugly, unhappy sound. “They've been trying that one for years. It's really something you only fall for once or twice, but the idiots keep trying it anyway. I'm fine, Midoriya.”

Izuku peers up at his taller friend and nods, trusting that at face value. “It doesn't make it okay, you know?”

He leans against the wooden frame of the shoe lockers, slipping off his shoes and slipping his indoor ones on carefully as Shinsou replies with a noncommittal noise, like he's curious.

“Even if they haven’t hurt you this time, it’s the intent that matters. Even if they didn’t succeed, they *p-planned* to hurt you and that’s not okay. It’s...” Izuku sighs, tucking his shoes away with a little more force than necessary, “It’s not *right*. ”

Shinsou is silent for a long moment, as Izuku straightens up from his crouch and stretches out a little as he grabs his backpack and settles it back between his shoulder blades. His gaze is detached, like his purple haired friend is thinking thoughts far away from this school.

“It doesn’t matter though.” Shinsou’s voice is tight, the words rote and memorised. Izuku wonders how long the taller boy has been trying to make himself believe that.

“It does.” Izuku lets that foreign courage build in his lungs, silver dripping onto his tongue. “It always matters.”

Shinsou doesn’t answer him, just shoves a canned iced coffee into his hands and starts off towards the stairs that take them to their classroom. Izuku isn’t blind to the tremble in his hands as he moves away and tucks away that thought, lets his silver-hot courage fade away into his bones and follows his friend up the stairs.

He knows people are watching them, as Shinsou quips something witty while they clean graffiti off of their desks and Izuku can’t help the laugh that builds up in his chest, spilling bright.

The iced coffee is sweet and cold on his tongue, and he is soft at heart, but it’s a step.

Shinsou returns his grin with a hesitant smile, during homeroom when Izuku turns to pass back a stack of forms and Izuku glows with the fact that he thinks he’s finally getting somewhere.

Lunch should find him on the rooftop with Shinsou, eating rice balls and bugging Shinsou about where he had managed to get the iced coffee and nagging him about eating more.

Instead, Izuku finds himself locked in the third floor cleaning storage cupboard, the scent of artificial lemon and bleach burning acrid into his nose. He braces his shoulder against the door again, trying to budge it open but the lock holds fast against his efforts.

He can hear laughter outside the door, and he knows Takeda is still outside. Izuku hadn't been paying attention, intent on taking the stairs two at a time to get to the rooftop. He'd been held back by their English teacher after class, and he had been in a hurry to find his friend when Takeda had managed to snag him and force him into the cupboard with only a minor struggle.

He slams a palm against the door, feels the space around him encroaching tight— it reminds him of being trapped in a corner, unable to hide or flee. Claustrophobia is sinking its claws into the tension of his jaw, impossible tight as his teeth ache under the pressure and his heart beats like it is trying to break through his ribs. He repeats the motion one more time, banging loudly.

“Takeda!! L-let me out! Please, let me out!”

There's a brief pause— Izuku wants to hope his classmate is going to capitulate but he doesn't believe it. Then he hears the brunette laugh again, closer to the door this time. “I warned you, loser. *This*,” Izuku



flinches back from the door as a heavy thud shakes it as Takeda kicks it, “ *This* is on you!”

Izuku feels his frustration mounting in tandem with his fear, urging each base instinct higher and higher. The cupboard is dark and it is shrinking like a cage around him, a boa constrictor drawing him tighter and closer. “Takeda! Let me out!”

It’s the loudest he’s been in years, a roar of sound echoing from his lungs and he is cold, achingly *cold* in the rush of his anger. He can feel Takeda’s shock, palpable through the wood of the door. He can hear the soft noise of rubber soles against the corridor, fainter as Takeda backs away from the door.

“You’re just a quirkless, *godless* piece of *shit*, Midoriya! No wonder you are with that freak, I-I wonder how long it will take you to get the courage to *jump* —“

Izuku is still cold— but it is an empty cold, hollow down to his marrow.

*(take a swan dive off the roof)*

“Hey, *freak* here. You want to tell me what the *fuck* you’re doing with my friend?”

Izuku can feel his weight shift against the door as he hears his friend outside the door, leaning in against the cool wood and desperately trying to ignore the rasp of his breathing as the tang of artificial cleaner fills his lungs and the room shrinks ever closer to him.

( *Someone else is doing the **right** thing* )

“What, nothing to say when there’s actual *consequences* for your words? Where did that *brave* ,” Izuku can hear the sarcasm dripping like honey of Shinsou’s tongue, can picture the twist of thin lips as he spits vitriol back at Takeda, “ *brave* boy go, the one who was telling a kid to go *jump, huh?* ”

Izuku can’t remember the last time this happened— doesn’t remember another child stepping between Izuku and danger, just because it was right.

There’s no reply from Takeda— he’s not a fool, and Izuku can just about hear the skid of his shoes on the corridor flooring as he dashes towards to the stairs and Izuku sobs as the door of the cleaning cupboard swings open, choking on the rush of clean air.

Shinsou’s eyes are wide as he’s suddenly greeted with an armful of woozy Izuku, both ending up on the floor as Izuku descends into the thin air of a panic attack and his friend does his best to coax him through it.

Izuku just focuses his mind entirely onto the sensation of a warm palm against his shoulder and slowly, *slowly* pulls his composure back around him like a cloak. It feels like dragging a damp wetsuit on, ill fitted to his skin and sticking, refusing to budge until he forces it. His head is pounding, fresh air finally clearing away the stuffiness in his lungs but still they refuse to let him *breathe* .

Shinsou is a heavy weight against his shoulders grounding him firmly into the present as slowly but surely, the world comes back to him. In

little waves, he can hear the sound of Hitoshi's breathing beside him and the rasp of cloth as his sleeve brushes against Izuku's shoulders. The corridor is still empty— there is nobody but them, crouched outside a supply cupboard.

"It's June 22nd, and it's Wednesday. You're in the third year corridor near the stairwell, and I'm sitting right next to you. It's lunch time, and there's a patch of sunlight on your knee. It should feel warm."

Izuku can feel his eyes brimming with tears, hot and heavy against his lashes as he shifts away from the half-embrace of his friend. He scrubs at them in futility, letting his head fall back to bump against the door of the cupboard and tries desperately to clear away the still-fresh panic of enclosing walls.

"That was a pretty bad panic attack, Midoriya." Shinsou's voice is even, controlled— Izuku wonders if he has panic attacks, how he knows how to ground Izuku down so he doesn't float off into the stratosphere. "Are you feeling safe?"

Izuku shakes out his hands from their cramped shapes against the fabric of his uniform pants and breathes out in one large gust of air, letting the last shaky remnants of his panic flow with it. He's not entirely better, his stomach is turning like he's going to be sick and he feels woozy, like he's run too far with too little oxygen but—

"Y-yeah. I do, Shinsou."

And there will be time later to question his friend, to think deeper into the fact that Izuku has the sneaking suspicion that no one has ever helped Shinsou the way he did just now. There will be time, after this, for Izuku and Shinsou to talk about the whisper of *godless* that sits conspicuously between them, and time enough for Shinsou to spill the questions Izuku can see hovering on his tongue.

Instead, Izuku grabs his lunch and drags his best ( *only* ) friend to the rooftop, endeavouring to forget himself and soak up the sun, the cool breeze on his skin and the wide open expanse of the sky above him.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

“Midoriya... are we friends?”

Izuku glances down at his friend, tired face hidden from his view as Shinsou pulls his shoes on after class. His hands are trembling in his pockets as he answers.

“D-do you *want* to be friends, Shinsou?”

His classmate pauses in tying his laces for a long moment and then nods decisively, like he’s made up his mind in a moment. “I do, I think.”

Izuku can’t help the grin on his face, adjusting the straps on his yellow backpack and grinning at the little microphone decals his mum has sewn into the straps as he does so. “Then o-of course we are!”

Shinsou doesn’t exactly smile back at him, but there is a looseness to his face, a softness to his posture that Izuku has only caught glimpses of in the past.

There’s a new contact in his phone as he skips further out of the city, a name and number to join the only other one on the list.

Izuku perches himself in front of the white stone altar and beams, excitement coursing through his veins as he lights an incense stick and places it next to the fruit filling the shallow water-worn basin in the stone.

The sun is warm, sunset still some time away and he has plenty of time.

“Hey, y-you would not *believe* that day I have had today!”

( *This is the **right** thing to do* )

# fallout part 1

## Chapter Summary

Sup mother truckers! Surprise update!

You'll still get another on Sunday!

[Discord](#)

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

Izuku wants to say that life settles into a solid routine after that day, and that Takeda never lays a hand on him again. He desperately wishes he could say that but life is never fair, and it is never easy.

Three months into his schooling at Tokage junior high, there's a media leak of a previous villain arrest. The media is consumed by the hushed-up arrest of a high profile villain, wanted for murder and arson. The fall out is almost immediate: Izuku finds both he and his mother thrust into the public spotlight hours after the story airs.

It takes him long empty moments, staring out to the small crowd gathered outside their apartment building, to realise why *they* are here.

He and Inko aren't listed on the charges list— but they are mentioned in the reports. The whole world can see into the gaps of their lives and Izuku knows they are going to be eaten alive. They've made the connections, between their last names and like a dog with a rat, the media will corner them until they bleed.

For the second time in six months, there is a hero sitting on their couch. Izuku somehow thinks that this visit is far more daunting, because they won't be able to escape this. They could flee their

apartment and leave those memories far behind but—

They will never be rid of Midoriya Hisashi.

Present Mic is sitting on their couch, looking a lot cleaner and more presentable than he did the last time he graced their home. Yet somehow, he looks just as gutted as he did the first. There's a man in a dark-toned police uniform accompanying him— short brown hair framing a serious face and deep set blue eyes. He's obviously police but Izuku feels like he's seen the man before.

A lot of the stress on their faces could be attributed to the fact that his mother has been blasting them since the minute they darkened her doorway almost ten minutes ago. He tunes back into the conversation, eyes falling away from the reporters he sees pulling up outside and he turns to face the two men.

“-you promised us! You *promised* that we could be safe, that you would keep this under wraps! And now—“ His mother's tone is fierce and vicious as she sweeps a hand towards the window Izuku is standing at. “The whole world knows us!”

The officer next to the blond hero startles into the conversation, as if eager to make amends. “Ma'am, no mention of your names has been leaked! Just—“

Inko cuts him off with a sharp noise in the back of her throat and fixes him with a glare Izuku barely knew she was capable of. “Just what, Takahashi-san?” She gestures again towards Izuku, this time intent on him. “That he has a wife, a child? A *family*, with the same last names. They have *everything* they need to find us and I am not talking about the reporters!”

There's a thundering silence in the aftermath of her barely raised voice. She has barely spoken above a normal speaking volume this entire time— Izuku wonders if either of them even have the capacity for that level of rage anymore, not when it is loud. "They have everything they need to find us, officer and I don't think they're going to be as nice as the media will be."

The younger man is stunned, silent as he sinks back against the couch cushions and avoids Inko's gaze like it's burning him. Izuku can see the faint whorl of colour against the dark fabric of his colour but it's quickly concealed as he adjusts his uniform. Takahashi's eyes meet Izuku's as he does and he wonders why there's so much sadness in it. The man has a mark— shouldn't he be grateful?

But there's no time to really consider it, because his mother is on her warpath once again as she rounds on Present Mic, who meets her expression with a blank face and the slightest downward crook of his lips is the only thing to betray his inner turmoil.

"And you—" Izuku sees the moment his mother's anger cracks and fades, the tremble in her hands as she lowers them. "You said we would be *safe*." Her voice cracks and wobbles— Izuku feels like he is a small child again, crouched in a kitchen that smells like sulphur and smoke.

"I did say that." The blond man begins after a brief pause, like he was trying to catch his breath. "And it is *my* fault that your identities have been leaked. I was involved in your case, listeners, and it was my sidekick who leaked the files. I—" he scratches with trembling hands at the side of his face, like he cannot keep still and needs to keep moving lest he lose composure.

He continues after a deep breath. "I beg your forgiveness— this is the fault of my agency and by default, it is my fault. Please allow us to repay this by doing all we can to diminish the media fallout and provide whatever protection we can." The hero ends his heartfelt



declaration with a deep bow, an action that the officer hurries to emulate. Izuku has to stifle a laugh when he sees the man's nose barely miss the table.

The air feels heavy in the silence, as Izuku's mother sinks shakily into the armchair and braces her face into both hands. Izuku can see the air as it leaves her lungs, watches the way her back bows from the stress and feels that glacial anger creeping along his thoughts once again. If Izuku had been *more*—

He casts the thought aside as soon as it begins, shoving it to the background of anxious thoughts buzzing between his ears and moves to kneel beside his mother. "Mum..." He stops, wants to search for that silver-hot courage but there is no forge in his chest and his lungs are no longer bellows to fuel his confidence into a supernova. "W-we'll be okay. I think..."

Izuku glances to where the blond hero is watching them with something achingly familiar in his eyes, like he is seeing a memory behind golden glasses. "I think he means well."

'*We can trust him*', he means and Izuku knows his mother can read between the lines. They've been reading between the lines for years, between conversations about groceries were the looks that asked about bruises and the unsaid words that let them know they were okay.

She holds his hands, comforting and firm. "You realise this is going to come out at school...right, sweetheart?"

And abstractly, *yeah*. Izuku had known, without an emotional attachment to the idea, that everyone is going to know. People would know when they looked at him.

But hearing it spoken out loud, knowing *Shinsou* is one of those people? It sits cold and heavy, like a greasy meal, in his mouth and Izuku finds he cannot swallow down the panic in his chest.

“Y-yeah. But.. it’s going to be everywhere now. It’s not like another school will have n-never heard of M-Midoriya His-H-“ he hiccups a little in frustration and tightens his hand against his mothers. “*Him*. S-so—“

He breathes deep into his chest, to the point where his lungs ache with the strain and lets the fear dissipate into the extremities of his body. “So there’s no point going anywhere other than where I am. At least I-I know people at Tokage.”

He specifically does *not* tell his mother that two of three people he speaks to regularly at his school fill his shoes with tacks and hunt him for sport between classes. She knows about *Shinsou* and he’s hardly about to destroy her sense of ease about his schooling just because the boys with no real knack for hurting people want to shove him around in the corridors.

*(Izuku knows real villains when he sees them)*

His mother is searching his face, searching for something— he doesn’t know what but she seems to find it all the same. Her hands ease in their grasp and she runs her fingertips, seemingly unthinking, over the scar tissue and he shivers without meaning to. She drops his hands like they are branding her skin and Izuku tries to remain like stone.

*(It hurts)*

His mother turns back towards their unexpected guests, spine once more a straight line and there is no trace of the soft unhappiness he had seen in his mother's voice when she finally speaks. "We accept your apology and the reparations you are prepared to offer us. I would also expect that the sidekick who started all of this mess is no longer working within your agency, Present Mic?"

Her voice is honey sweet but Izuku knows the hero across from her isn't fooled. He shows no outward sign but besides him, Izuku sees Takashi's nervously swallow—the bob of his Adam's apple is vaguely nauseating in a way Izuku cannot place. "Ma'am—"

"I am not talking to you, Officer Takahashi."

The brunet cuts off immediately and looks away.

"I can assure you that her employment under my licence was terminated as soon as it was made clear to us that she was the origin of the leak. I... I couldn't rest easy knowing someone in my employee had brought harm to people she has been trained to save." There's a hitch in his voice—which is surprisingly soft without his quirk, Izuku thinks. So much of the hero's public persona is larger than life—it's designed to attract attention, to draw the focus of people around him because that suited his style.

But, it is a persona in the end. Izuku thinks this must be far closer to the core of Present Mic's true heroism. He is steadfast and honest—Izuku has wondered how much of his care is Apollo's influence but: the closer he looks, the more Izuku thinks that this is just how the hero is.

He thinks of the microphone badges on his backpack and knows he's made a good choice, regardless of the leak and its impacts.

Inko purses her lips tight, eyes intent on the angles of Mic's down turned mouth and she makes a soft noise as she mulls it over again.

Izuku doesn't envy the men stuck on the mother end of her gaze right now. He thinks, not for the first time, that everyone underestimates his mother on sight alone, much like they do him. But they both know that people don't just survive lives like theirs without developing a deeper strength.

His mother has a core of iron, heated to cherry-red and she has yet to be extinguished.

"If that is so, we will gladly accept your assistance. What protective measures would be best?"

Takahashi speaks first and Izuku is almost surprised that his mother hasn't cut him off, considering she hasn't let the younger man finish an entire sentence in the entire time he's been in their home. "Ma'am, we're prepared to offer building security for this apartment, both for your protection and that of your neighbours. In the pursuit of keeping this under wraps, we don't want to inundate the area with a visible police presence."

He pauses, seemingly assessing whether they are following along and Inko nods along, hands tight in the folds of her skirt.

"We don't want to draw attention to Midoriya-kun's school at this point, so we would like to refrain from an overt police presence there as well and instead seek to make his teachers aware of the situation," He halts there, expression nervous. "We believe Salamander was involved in some way with a large yakuza organisation and we want to give you the best balance of anonymity and safety possible."

He glances at the hero at his side, clearly finished with his section. The blond man launches, a tad loudly, into his own section with barely a gap. “Of course, my agency is willing to offer for your area to be included in our patrol routes. One of our sidekicks or heroes travels this area on an average of once every two hours. With a minor adjustment, this will change to once an hour. E—“

The voice hero cuts off for a second, like he has to stop himself from saying something. “An associate of mine has volunteered to do extra sweeps of this area when he can, mainly at night during his main patrol hours. And—“

“Do you trust h-him?”

Present Mic pauses mid sentence, eyes flickering to Izuku and holding his gaze. “What was that, little listener?”

Izuku wrings his hands together nervously, searches for that silver-hot pool in his stomach and finds it brimming. “This man, who wants to help... do you trust him?”

Present Mic blinks at hi, green eyes wide before they settle into a warm squint. The smile that fills his face is small, soft— barely there. “More than anyone else, little one.”

And Izuku can see it— he sees the trust for a man Izuku has never met and it overflows from the hero’s words. “Really?”

“Really really,” the man confirms with a nod.

Izuku glances down his hands, traces the edges of his scars with absent thought and hums in reply, letting the man continue on.

“My station and agency will handle the media aspect as best we can. All that falls to you is to weather what falls through the cracks— don’t accept interviews, don’t reply to anyone who sticks a microphone in your face and if you can, avoid being alone while in transit. Do you both have someone who is able to keep your company during your trips outside the home?”

Inko hums, clearly thinking. “I have a coworker in the building, so that’s easy enough to organise. It’s more Izuku’s school transit trips that could prove a hassle.”

Izuku echoes her hum, wracking his brain. There’s not really anyone, except—

“Izuku, could you ask your friend in class if he’s willing to walk with you?”

Except Shinsou.

Shinsou Hitoshi who has probably just found out his new friend is the son of a mass murdering villain.

Izuku hadn’t even begun to think of that aspect and wonders, disantly like he has been ejected from his own mind, how his father manages to destroy everything good Izuku has built even when he is gone.

“I- I can ask, I guess?” He eventually murmurs back. His voice sounds

weak and reedy, even to his own ears. His phone feels like a branding iron in his pocket, pressed against his thigh.

Izuku feels like he checked out at that point— he knows his mother is still talking, but his awareness narrows down to the pinpoint of the strain kneeling in this position aches in his thighs. The floor is hard against the balls of his feet, toes long since numb.

His phone buzzes against his thigh and Izuku takes the opportunity to leave for his room. He should check his phone but when he sees four missed messages from Shinsou, his resolve cracks like a faberge egg under a hammer and he switches off his phone and loses himself in the folds of his duvet and the muted grey light of the overcast sky.

Izuku knows it isn't the right thing to do—

But today, he thinks he can be excused from doing what is right.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Hizashi watches the teen stumble from the room like his feet are going to fall out from beneath him at any moment. He glances to his mother

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Her face is empty, calm— built as if from stone and he wonders what deity had carved the story of her life. There's a glimmer of gold on the edges of his bones— it urges him forward, to know what the god of the future wants him to see.

Hizashi has only refused Apollo a handful of times in his life.

This moment is the eighth time. He refuses to look into the gap of time presented to him in that very moment, ignores the siren call of time and memory slipping through his fingers like sand and silk. Apollo is hot and dark with promise behind his tongue but he bites it, the copper tang a rebuke.

“Is he okay?” Hizashi doesn’t mean to ask, doesn’t know if it’s his question to ask but the tension sinking from Inko’s shoulders is enough for him to know it was necessary.

Inko chuckles and it's not a happy sound, choked a little from stress. “No, I-I would think not. He...” She stops, fingers running nervously through her hair. “He’s only just found a friend. He’s never really had one, not with... it wasn’t allowed, so he never had them and... He’s finally gotten a little better.”

Inko’s eyes are wet but no tears fall down her cheeks. “He’s finally started to smile outside and I’m worried I’ll never see him this happy again.”

Hizashi looks to the stairs where Izuku has disappeared and wonders whether either of them have ever truly been happy in the first place.

As Inko sees them out, gold flares in the corner of his vision when she shakes his hand.

Hizashi sees a wall covered in red, and it haunts his sleep for weeks.



(Apollo lurks like a contented cat around his shoulders, barely there but Hizashi does not tend his altar until the last of the offerings have wilted)

Hizashi hates seeing even the barest glimpses of the future.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

It's evening by the time Izuku crawls out of his self-imposed, blanket-blind exile and he feels like he's been dunked in a cement mixer and left to dry out. His eyes are gritty from crying, and his throat is sore.

When he turns his phone on, there are another three texts from Shinsou.

*Friday 15:21*

*MI: Hi Shinsou! Just texting so you have my number! Thank you for giving it to me!*

*SH: ok, you're welcome.*

*19:49*

*SH: why am i seeing your family name on the evening news?*

*SH: midoriya, are you at home? my foster parents said there's a very large crowd near police station.*

*SH: midoriya?*

*Saturday 07:31*

*SH: midoriya, are you and your mother safe? i know you invited me over this weekend but i understand if you need to cancel*

*09:48*

*SH: <https://musutafumessenger.co.jp/urgent/Midoriya-Hisashi-behind-bars-coverup/>*

*is this what you've been hiding?*

The link shows up with a preview of the article and Izuku feels his stomach turn when he sees those dark eyes.

*12:03*

*SH: i tried to call you. would you like to meet up? there's a good park near the hokabi building.*

Izuku knows the building, can see the route. They must live closer to each other than Izuku had predicted— it makes sense the longer he thinks about it. He sees the other teen relatively often, mostly crouched in alleyways with various cats so it would be logical that they are close to each other.

He hovers over the keyboard of his phone, the first few letters of a message tapped out but he pauses, the vicious cycle of anxiety brewing in his mind like over-steeped coffee.

A small chat bubble opens as he sees Shinsou starting to type once again and he almost drops his phone in the sudden burst of nerves.

*12:35*

...

...

...

...

*SH: you have send receipts on, i can see you've finally read them. are you able to meet?*

Izuku shakes the last of the nap stupor from his head and quickly types back, nervous and he sends the message before he can second

guess it.

*MI: I'll ask!*

He shuts his phone with half a thought and shifts off the bed, wincing at muscles sore from the awkward position he had ended up napping in. He stumbles down the stairway and finds his mother intent on a book in her hands, the cover rough and well worn.

Izuku recognises the leather bound tome immediately, a childish glee taking up space in his chest. The cover of Hygini Fabulae peeks between his mothers fingers— Izuku hasn't seen it in years but still brings soft memories to mind, of whispered legends. Izuku is certain he can still remember, word for word, the tale of Ino and Themisto—

—he wonders if somewhere in his mother's bookshelf is the book of the wolves who devoured the sun and the moon.

“Mum?” He calls, waits patiently as she sets the book aside with a great deal of care. It was her mother's and her mother's before her— Izuku wonders what it will feel like in his hands when it is his.

“Yes, sweetheart? Did you get a hold of your friend?” She prompts and Izuku drags his gaze away from the book to focus on her, nodding.

“Ah, yeah. He wants to meet up at the hokabi building?” He knows its close enough that his mother will seriously consider letting him go— the police are still in the area wrangling the media, there's bound to be at least one pro on patrol.

It still takes her long moments of thought before she nods, shakily but sure. ‘That’s not too far— maybe he can meet you at the back gate? I know its close by, but it’s so soon. I don’t want you to be alone just yet.’”

Izuku knows it makes sense, should be the preferred course of action but he doesn’t want to stretch this painful encounter with Shinsou any longer than he has to. He wants to get it over and done with.

“I-I’ll message him and ask if that’s okay.”

He clicks his phone to life and scrolls into their conversation, quickly tapping in a reply.

*MI: can you meet me at the back entrance of my building? My mum isn’t comfortable letting me go out by myself right now, with the media presence and everything*

*Midoriya Izuku sent a location pin!*

*SH: thats fine. i’ll be there in fifteen.*

He almost drops his phone when Shinsou replies, the text seemingly instant and he wonders if the other teen had been waiting on the text screen that entire time. He doesn’t know if the thought is comforting or if it brings his anxiety surging to the forefront.

Either way, his stomach rebels and he’s reminded that he hasn’t eaten yet today, not that he thinks he’s capable of handling even the thought of food right now.

“He’s f-fine with that, so I’m gonna get changed. He’s about fifteen minutes out.”

She nods in response, gaze turning back to the book on the coffee table and she traces the cracking leather with something soft in her eyes. “That’s fine, dear. Just.... Keep your phone on you, don’t leave by yourself and please make sure Shinsou-kun walks you back as well!”

Izuku is already halfway up the stairs by then, and the last instruction floats up after him. He changes quickly, grimacing at how awful he feels without a shower but he barely has time to consider it. A white t-shirt ironically stamped with ‘t-shirt’ in clear font on the front, dark jeans and at his mother’s insistence, he grabs a coat from the rack.

She also shoves an apple into his hands as he ducks out the door, which Izuku instantly tucks away into his pockets.

She watches him disappear down the stairwell and Izuku wonders why he feels a chill down his spine when he finally leaves her sight.

Shinsou is waiting at the back entrance, slouched against the red-brick wall and dressed in mostly black.

“So maybe we’re a little more alike than I thought.”

Izuku stops, confused and halfway into a nervous greeting. “Uh... in what w-way?”

Shinsou's gaze turns sharp and cold, like he's watching every turn of Izuku's brain behind his eyes.

“Like having mass murderers for parents.”

# fallout part 2

## Chapter Summary

Last time: a media leak! Inko confronts the failures of the police and hero system! Izuku has a minor breakdown when Shinsou reveals they share a bad background!

## Chapter Notes

Woot woot! It's Sunday for me— so it's update day for you! I'm using AEST for my update times, so this is probably Saturday for most of my readers!

I'm so glad y'all enjoyed the last chapter and that 'lil one liner I left y'all with!

Come yell at me!

## Discord

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

(Also there's fanart :DDD )

Also holy crap y'all! 8k views, over 300 bookmarks including the private ones, 800 kudos??? Almost 150 comments??

I'm just snowed under by how kind y'all have been ;-;

*Previously:*

*Shinsou is waiting at the back entrance, slouched against the red-brick wall and dressed in mostly black.*

*“So maybe we’re a little more alike than I thought.”*



*Izuku stops, confused and halfway into a nervous greeting. “Uh... in what w-way?”*

*Shinsou’s gaze turns sharp and cold, like he’s watching every turn of Izuku’s brain behind his eyes.*

*“Like having mass murderers for parents.”*

..◆□□□□□□ ◡ □□□□□□◆..

Shinsou is halfway out the gate before Izuku’s brain regains control of his body and he practically sprints after the taller boy. He huffs for breath as he finally reaches his side, cursing the other boy’s height and subsequent walking speed.

“Shinsou, you c-ca-can’t just say something like that all of a s-sudden!” Izuku stammers out between gasps, two part panic and one part lungs constricted around too little air. The other teen pauses all of a sudden, hands poised as if to hold Izuku’s shoulders but hesitating inches from contact.

“Midoriya, you’re outside your apartment building. It’s a quarter to one in the afternoon. The sky is overcast, though it looks like there’s rain coming from the east. It’s been doing that for three days, so it probably won’t hit us.”

Izuku feels himself ease back from the crest of a panic wave and slowly slides back into the calm trough he lives in as a baseline, the overwhelming fear receding back into his bones.

Izuku holds one shuddering mouthful of air deep in his chest, holds it until it pushes at his throat with fiery urgency and he gasps it out like a drowning man breaking the surface of the water. “W-what the *actual* h-hell Shinsou?”

He wants to know what the hell is going on, wants to know why Shinsou looks like he’s going to shake out of his skin if Izuku brushes against him. The taller teen grits his teeth and shakes his head, stepping away from Izuku now that he’s breathing easily once more and running one hand through his hair. He glances around the back entrance alleyway, as if checking for eavesdroppers.

“Look, it’s not really something we can or *should* discuss out here. Let’s go.” He pauses, head still turned away to stare down the alleyway and Izuku swears he can see Shinsou’s eyes flickering in the filtered light— but it’s gone the next moment and Izuku is mostly sure it was a trick of the sun.

Izuku once again scurries to rejoin his friend, the pleasure in his chest at how Shinsou slows his pace to stay by his side warring with the bitter tendril of *something* in his chest as. ‘ *Mass murderers for parents* ’ spins round and round in his mind. It’s a dizzy, heady juxtaposition and he tries desperately to shunt it to the side.

He mostly fails.

“W-why the Hokabi building?” He manages to get out, genuinely curious and hoping the answer would help distract him. The air is cooler than he had expected it to be from inside his own unit, and he sends a mental thank you to his mother for the jacket currently draped neatly over one arm. He has a feeling that he’s going to need it. “I-is there something special a-about it?”

Izuku is treated to the sight of Shinsou tucking his face down into the scarf draped around his neck in an attempt to hide the pink staining his cheeks. The taller teen *blushes* and mutters something low into the fabric against his mouth.

“W-what?” Izuku feels like he shouldn’t be smiling, but he’s determined to enjoy what little of this he can. “W-what did you say, I couldn’t hear you-“

“There’s a cat cafe next door!” Shinsou instantly looks like he regrets the outburst, cheeks still pink above the edges of the grey scarf, and it’s a surprisingly cute image. Izuku can’t help the little burble of laughter that leaks from his mouth at the sheer embarrassment on his friend’s face.

“No, n-no, I’m not laughing at you! I promise! I just..” Izuku grins, glancing down to fiddle with the strings of his jacket hood. “I see you all the time with the street cats so... uh, yeah. It just makes a lot of sense and I r-really shouldn’t have been surprised but I guess you didn’t really seem like the type for cat cafes?” He’s well aware he’s devolved into mumbling but Shinsou is staring at him like he’s grown a second head.

“You’ve seen me with the cats?”

Izuku hums in confirmation, swinging his arm a little as he walks and stopping to peer at a plant growing up through a crack in the pavement— he thinks it’s a weed but the yellow flowers are pretty and round. He shivers as the wind picks up, rocking the small plant in its wake. “Yeah, I go walking around the district after school. I... I didn’t get to go out much before we moved here...”

He trails off, sneaking a glance up at his friend and wonders if Shinsou’s jaw hurts with how hard he’s clenching it. “Why do you get

to go out this year?”

Izuku knows Shinsou doesn't mean anything malicious by the question but he shivers anyway, no wind to blame this time. “L-like you said before— that's not something w-we should talk about out here.”

Shinsou nods: a sharp, jerky movement that radiates the tension of his shoulders and neck up into his face. His friend is a tightly coiled ball of tension beside him as they start walking once more. “B-but yeah. I've seen the cats— I've started leaving water for the orange tabby near the konbini, the one I think is pregnant. She's pretty friendly, and I'm kinda worried that it'll get her in trouble.”

Shinsou's jaw eases after a moment, like he's thinking of something soothing. “Yeah, I've been keeping an eye on Kabocha for a few weeks. There's a vet who's been trying to catch her nearby, he's getting closer to nabbing her the last few weeks.”

Izuku laughs in response, stepping over a crack in the sidewalk and jumping a little on the spot. “*Kabocha!* You named an orange tabby ‘Pumpkin’, t-that's so cute! It suits her so well, food names for pets are just the best thing i think! And I think I've met the vet, Nao-sensei?” At Shinsou's nod, Izuku grins brightly.

There's still a well of panic yawning in the chasm of his stomach but he finds the easy laughter between them a convenient bridge.

“Yeah! He was telling me what to avoid feeding her and the other cats last week and wait, how do you keep feeding the cats because I *know* your foster parents wouldn't support that if they couldn't be bothered to send you to school with lunch!”

Shinsou's hand's clench where they're tucked into his hoodie pockets

and there's that same tension crawling along his jaw once more. "I get a small allowance, and they need it more than I do."

Izuku bites his tongue hard enough to draw blood at that, the pain just barely enough to rebuke himself and stop the words from falling out of his mouth, that he thinks his friend doesn't need to, *shouldn't* neglect himself for animals but he stops himself. Shinsou Hitoshi doesn't need pity from Izuku but—

It's not **right** .

From the three months Izuku has known his friend, Shinsou's done nothing but prove wrong everything Izuku has been told about the teen. He's told that the boy is cruel—

Izuku sees a boy with an empty stomach crouched in an alleyway, feeding a cat with food bought with money meant for him. Shinsou skips *meals* to make sure street cats— broken, abandoned things nobody cares about— don't go hungry.

Takeda whisper in his ears, tells him about the *freak* in the chair behind him—

Izuku just sees a boy who was disgusted by the thought of cruelty, who had rejected the very idea of villainy like it was poison to him. And he sees wide eyes that don't believe him when Izuku says he isn't afraid of him.

"I'm not e-even going to *start* with how many things are wrong with everything that just came out of your mouth because we don't ha-have that kind of time right now but Shinsou, just because your f-f-foster family says so doesn't mean you don't deserve it." Izuku levels a shaky

gaze back at him as they walk, the taller boy looking away to avoid it. “B-but I’m glad you feed them... everybody needs someone in their corner, right?”

*‘I’m in **your** corner’*, is what Izuku says with his eyes and when Shinsou glances down at him with cheeks still stained pink, Izuku really hopes he sees it, clear as day. Shinsou just hums in response and they walk in silence for the last few minutes of their trek. It’s not uncomfortable or heavy— it’s a quiet, companionable absence of speech that feels characteristic of their friendship.

The Hokabi building looms up ahead— it’s an easy landmark in a city without street names, the cherry-red paint old and peeling. Still, it’s no less distinctive for its age and it’s proven a popular meet up spot. It doesn’t hurt that there’s a community police box nearby to ask for directions in a hurry.

The location and increased foot traffic must drastically improve business for the small cafe Izuku sees tucked into the commercial building next door. It’s a soft yellow brick storefront and through the large circular window, Izuku can see the shape of a cat pressed to the sun-warmed glass. There’s a sign painted on the doorway in white, ornate lettering:

‘Cozy Catmosphere’

And beneath, in smaller lettering reads ‘Out of this world cat encounters!’

Izuku looks sideways at his tall friend, dressed in dark colours and an apathetic expression firmly in place on his face, and then back at the brightly coloured cafe once again. Shinsou caught his eye as he did so,

one eyebrow quirking up and Izuku flushed, quickly averting his gaze.

“Is there something on my face, Midoriya?” Shinsou quipped as he reached forward to push the door open, a cheery ringing above their heads as the doorbell announced their arrival.

“N-no! T-this just doesn’t look like somewhere you’d hang out!” Izuku hurries his words out as he follows Shinsou towards the counter; there’s no one behind it yet but there’s a sign informing them that someone will be along after the bellchime and Izuku spends a few seconds peering even closer at the cafe and his friend.

Shinsou taps out an absent rhythm as he leans against the tall marble/topped counter, long fingernails clacking on the stone. It’s something Izuku’s noticed before— he keeps his hands and nails surprisingly well maintained, nails far longer than Izuku has ever managed to keep. Izuku’s a well-established nail biter and he’s always envied others who are able to keep them long. There’s something elegant about it, and though he’s sure it’s viewed as a feminine quality, Izuku thinks long nails could easily be a defensive aid.

“I used to come here because they would let me see the kittens in the morning before school and once I started drinking coffee, they were on the way when I walked. And…” he trails off as he uses his height to look further into the cafe. “I really do like the cats.”

They’re cut off from further conversation as a cafe worker appears at the counter with a warm smile. “Hiya Shinsou-kun! You brought a friend, I don’t think you’ve ever brought someone else here!”

Shinsou’s cheeks are pink as he hands the shorter woman a small blue plastic card and she punches two out of it with a small metal hole punch. “It’s good to see you, Kirishima-san. Is-“

The dark haired woman smiles wider this time, revealing sharp teeth as she does and she hands the small card back to Shinsou. “Hōjicha is free, yes ! You’re so predictable, Shinsou-kun! Do you want me to drop him off at your table when you guys get settled?”

Shinsou’s cheeks have flared red once again and he nods, tucking his face down into his scarf once more. “Yes please...”

It’s... odd to see his friend outside of school like this. Shinsou holds himself differently to how he does at school, and different yet again to the soft moments Izuku catches in alleyways, with the purple haired teenager crouched beside cats. He looks more comfortable in his skin than he does inside the halls of Tokage Junior High, but with none of the openness Izuku sees when the other boy is enticing a cat closer.

Their hostess grins and begins leading them to a table set near a window along the far wall, though Izuku balks when he realises neither of them have paid. He doesn’t want to be a cheapskate, so he digs into his pockets to locate his wallet.

“Don’t worry about it Midoriya, I used up my free visit token for you and Kirishima-san lets me stay for free most of the time.” There’s a whole wealth of things unsaid between the look Shinsou shoots the older woman at the last segment but Izuku is really, really wanting to not add too much more complexity to his day at this point.

His nerves are rising up in a wave once more, balancing on the crest of the storm-wild waters of mind. He’s managed to keep his mind fairly settled through pure self-control during the walk here, able to disconnect from the rising panic by way of distraction and movement.

But sliding into the booth across from Shinsou brings it roaring to the



forefront of his mind.

He opens his mouth and silver-hot words pour over his tongue. “So... mass murdering parents?”

Shinsou’s pale eyes flicker up from where they were focused on the coffee menu in front of them, tracing their way over Izuku like he’s looking for a previously missed sign that shouted ‘my dad is a mass murdering asshole’. Like he’s trying to find a hint of it in the frame of Izuku’s body. He hums softly, distractedly in agreement before his mouth crooks into, well. Izuku can’t call it a smile, the edges too sharp and raw.

“Mass murdering parents indeed.” Shinsou hands the small coffee and drinks menu to Izuku as he replies, eyes instantly zeroing in the scar tissue covering his hand. “Those related to that at all?”

Izuku flinches, the hand clutching the laminated menu darting back like the burns are still fresh. He wonders if Shinsou is rereading the news titles in his mind, making the connections between mass murder and arson. “A-ah...no, not those ones.”

Shinsou’s pale eyes grow even sharper and Izuku curses his own words once again. “So some of them are?”

Izuku drops the menu back on the tablet and clenches his hands tight, hiding the scar tissue from sight. “So w-what if they, Shinsou?” He hisses out, like the words are going to burn his tongue if he traps behind his teeth. “S-should I ask what the scars on your c-collar bones are straight off the bat?”

Shinsou’s eyebrows are high up on his face, mouth open to reply but Izuku beats him to it, answering his own question with barely a beat

missed.

“N-no, *of course not* ! You deserve to keep your secrets, because t-they are yours and obviously neither of us h-have lived particularly nice lives, so we should b-be able to k-keep what we have, right?” Izuku pants as he stops to breathe, feeling the comfort of warmth building in his chest. It’s foreign, but not unwelcome.

Shinsou’s face is pale under the soft gold of the cafe lights and he’s saved from having to reply immediately as another waitress stops by to take their drink orders. Izuku breathes through his nose and politely orders the iced matcha latte, listening distractedly as Shinsou stutters as the waitress prompts him for his order. A triple shot latte with three shots of vanilla syrup is apparently his go-to, if the fond grin the waitress sports is anything to go by.

In the gap of silence between their ordering, another employee sweeps by with a large armful of fluffy white and it takes Izuku a long, *long* moment to realise it’s a *cat*. A positively huge white long haired cat with vivid blue eyes that yawns and flops into the cat bed set into the booth couch with little to no hesitation. It curls up with a yawn, eyes half lidded.

He reaches forward to pat the cat, before halting a few inches away. He’s never really interacted with cats before— they had never been allowed pets when he was a child and K-Bakugou hadn’t had pets at the time either. He’s never been game to try and pack the street cats either.

“Let him sniff your hand, palm up.” He flickers his gaze to Shinsou, and cautiously extends his palm for the cat to sniff. Izuku laughs as he proceeds to butt a soft head against his knuckles, obviously eager for attention.

“H-he’s so soft!” Izuku exclaims as he curls his fingertips into a spot under the cat’s jaw, grinning as he feels the area vibrating as the cat purrs. “Is this Hojicha?”

Shinsou nods, extending a pale hand to scratch gently at the curve of Hojicha’s flank. “Yeah, he’s one of the older cats but he was the first one I ever sat with. He’s very sweet, though people don’t seem to like him because—“ He pulls his hand back and shows the white fur clinging to his fingers in long threads. “He sheds a lot,” and then adds in a lower tone Izuku isn’t sure he’s meant to hear, “ *I don’t see why people come to a cat cafe and expect to leave without cat hair .*”

Izuku laughs, continuing his slow petting of the cat between them and enjoying the soft purring that fills the silence. There’s still some of the tenseness in the air between them, but it’s softened now— tempered by the break of time.

“I’m sorry.” Izuku glances over to Shinsou, who is determinedly avoiding his eyes as he speaks. “I... I shouldn’t have asked something like that. I—“ He cuts off, swallowing past a lump in his throat and he finally looks up. “I can’t imagine what it would be like if my family case got leaked. It was rude of me to be flippant ‘bout it.”

Izuku finds himself being the one avoiding eye contact for a long moment, looking down at where his hand rests against white fur. “I-I don’t want to say it’s *okay* , b-because that’s unfair to b-both of us. But...” he traces patterns on the leather of the couch beneath his right hand, the texture soothing even with his limited sensation.

“I can u-understand why you asked. Obviously, you m-made the c-connection between...”

Shinsou sips his water and places the glass down on the table, turning it around in place and watching the condensation leaving a ring of

moisture on the polished wood. “Between the arson and the burn scars? Yeah, logical jump. You don’t have to answer but... if it wasn’t him, what was it?”

Izuku finds his mind thrown back to white stone burning like a sun beneath his fingers and curling like a supernova between his toes, hands tightening instinctively. “It w-was when they presented me to be claimed, at the Meiji Jingu. They...” he swallows, remembers how the garden had smelt in the early morning and dew sat sweet on the grass. “They hadn’t had any luck with presenting me at the local altar, or our home altar a-and they got referred to the altar there.”

Izuku breathes deeply in and exhales through his nose, emptying out his lungs in one rush. “And when they placed me on the stones, they said fire engulfed me for a split second and that was it. No claim—“ he laughs at that, bitter. “Just b-burns and after t-that they never tried to find my patron again. My d... He wasn’t happy with t-that.”

Izuku glances up to find Shinsou looking at him with something buried in his eyes that Izuku doesn’t know what to call but it leaves him shifting in his seat under its weight. The taller teen leans back against the leather backed seat and mutters a quiet but heartfelt, “ *Shit* .”

Izuku laughs, a little on the hysterical side, at the emphatic curse and shakes his head. “Y-yeah. That’s my take on it t-too.”

He takes a moment to gather his thoughts, leaning forward to scratch gently at Hojicha’s jaw and smiling at the way the gentle cat turns into the touch. At least cats didn’t look at his hands like they were foreign parts of his body.

“I had trouble finding my patron as well.”

Izuku looks up to watch Shinsou picking distractedly at a hangnail on his thumb, talking as if far off in his mind. “Everytime he took me to the altars, everything felt fuzzy. I couldn’t connect with anything, couldn’t register anything properly for days. Like someone had drawn the world into a string so tight and thin, it drew me in as well.”

Izuku sucks a breath through his teeth.

“And when it finally snapped, it was like the world had collapsed in on itself. My quirk activated at the same time— a deity wanted me to know what it felt like before they let me use it, or so it would seem.”

Izuku can only stare, brain stuck in a loop of information as his brain breaks it all down into bite sized pieces. “But—“

“But I’ve got no mark, yeah?”

Izuku can only nod, mind trying to make sense of the entire situation.

“You’ve noticed my pupils, right? Or rather, the *lack* of them? Take a closer look.” Shinsou leans forward, elbows bracing his weight on the table as he shifts so his face is close enough for Izuku to see his eyes.

And in the sunlight reflecting through the windows, Izuku feels the air in his lungs freeze. Like a cat's eyes in headlights, the sun lights up the gold pattern of a snake coiled across his pupils and it disappears as the light falls to the side. It's a cut of colour across the pale purple— like someone has bisected his entire eye and filled the gap with gold. Silver burns hot under his tongue and gold freezes in his bones, as Shinsou leans back with a playful lilt to his mouth.

“Shinsou Hitoshi, devotee of Loki, at your disposal.”

Izuku blinks as his taller friend settles back into his seat, the light flickering once again over his eyes and he wonders why he had never noticed the marks before. Izuku supposes that the eyes are very rare places for a mark, so it's hardly somewhere he would have thought to look.

Izuku thinks, for half a second, that Shinsou looks *natural* like this—stretched in the sun, eyes lidded and glowing in the light.

He also knows that thought goes far deeper but Izuku is unwilling to follow it down the rabbit hole. He knows where it leads.

“Holy crow, eye m-marks are super rare Shinsou! A-and I’ve never even heard of Loki devotees— is there a l-local sect?” He enquires, genuinely curious.

Shinsou shakes his head, one long-fingered hand returning to give Hojicha some attention. Izuku spends one long, distracted second watching the way the fur parts beneath his nails. “There’s no local sect, or a regional altar. In fact,” he muses, thin lips pursed tight. “There’s no altars at all in Japan.”

Izuku blinks, nonplussed. “N-none? Are you sure?”

Shinsou nods, momentarily distracted as a waitress brings their drinks to the table and he loses himself in a large sip of coffee. Izuku stirs the ice in his tall glass; watching the vivid green mixing a little further with the milk, turning pale. “There’s none left. Most have been

destroyed or rotted away. There's plenty outside of Japan— I've spoken online to a lot of people and apparently Japan seems to be a dead zone. I know there's more of us— there's whole forum boards dedicated to us."

Izuku mulls the information over in his mind, stirs the glass once more and listens to the clink of the ice. "S-so there's just no a-altars? No spots for meetings?"

Shinsou stares into his coffee, seemingly lost in thought. "There was a string of arson on properties where public meetings were advertised, starting in the last forty years. I think they just gave up on public Loki devotion after that."

Izuku is consumed by this thoughts, mind making connections but—

It's not the right time.

They fall into a brief silence, each stuck in thoughts probably too private to share but— Izuku is struck with the sudden thought of *why* they are here.

"Ah... S-Shinsou?" The taller boy replies with a hum and Izuku takes it as a cue to continue. "What did you mean by w-what you said back at the apartment?"

He doesn't want to watch whatever is going to flash through Shinsou's eyes, so Izuku focuses on the cat purring beneath his hands. The cafe is bustling around them but Izuku feels like they exist in a bubble, quiet and separate.

“I thought it was fairly obvious. It would seem that we share the dubious honour having a villainous father.” Shinsou seems... bemused, Izuku thinks that’s the word for it. And maybe Izuku already knew that but he needs it confirmed, before he thinks he imagined that flicker of familiarity in Shinsou’s face.

“That w-was what I thought, yeah...” Izuku glances up to find Shinsou also looking away; he finds himself red in the face all of a sudden as they try to avoid each other’s gaze and somehow keep locking eyes instead. “So you—“

“My father, yes. It was an underground arrest and it never really made it to the media, the arresting hero fought to have a quiet trial when they found out my father had a wife and child. My mother died soon after we were placed in witness protection, and I was moved into foster care. The rest is history, as they say.” His voice is as flat as usual; Izuku can see how his hands tremble as he strokes Hojicha, the only sign that the confession is affecting him at all.

“When—“ Izuku cuts himself off, swallowing the previous thought down and rephrasing what he wants to ask. “How long have you been in foster c-care?”

Shinsou’s breath catches softly and Izuku pretends he doesn’t notice. Some things deserve privacy. “Seven years, close to fourteen different families.”

It’s Izuku’s turn to feel his breath catch, and he can only hope his friend chooses to ignore it just the same. “A-and this family, the ones who don’t *feed* —“ Izuku swallows down the rest of that sentence, anger welling like molten metal between his ribs and breathes out in one harsh burst through his nose. “How l-long have you been with that f-family?”



Shinsou takes a deep sip of his coffee, tracing a finger through the condensation on his water glass once again. “Three years now. They’re not so bad.”

Izuku wants to reach across and shake his friend, pull him back and forth like he can erase that thought from Shinsou’s mind like an etch and sketch. “N-not s-o bad, Shinsou? They barely *feed* you!”

Shinsou looks at him like he’s grown two heads, blinks slow like the cat underneath his hands. “And your father beat you, I think you win that sympathy above me.”

Izuku ignores the callous way it’s said— he knows this tactic, as Shinsou attempts to deflect Izuku’s anger somewhere more comfortable for the purple haired teen to deal with. “H-he did but why d-does that mean it’s *okay* for them to do that. Even if o-other places have been worse...” Izuku sucks in air between his front teeth, hissing low in the back of his throat. “Even if you’ve been in *worse* places, it doesn’t mean that you should just accept a b-bad home.”

There’s no taste of cold mint on his tongue or the heat building up behind his teeth and creeping along his ribs. This anger—

It’s all *his*.

“I lived in a h-home where my f-father hurt u-us, just because he *could*,” Izuku halts, feeling words pushing up past his tongue, ones that he can’t deny any longer. “And you live in a home where they hurt you —“

“They *don’t*— “

Izuku pushes past Shinsou's half baked reply, hands now clenched in his lap. " *And you* live in a home where they hurt you, just because they *can* ."

Izuku's hands are trembling, he's clenched them so hard beneath the table that his bones ache. "Lack of food is hurting you as well, Shinsou. Just because they don't hit—"

Shinsou's face flickers for a second; he shifts awkwardly and Izuku—

Izuku makes a connection, lightning fast and it sits heavy on his tongue, falling like a weight out of his mouth. "S-Shinsou," he sounds out, slowly. "They don't h-hit you... right?"

Shinsou drinks his coffee with shaking hands and doesn't reply. His gaze is pinned somewhere over Izuku's left shoulder, a thousand yards away. "S-Shinsou...?"

His friend mutters something into the cup between his hands, low and Izuku can't make sense of it. Shinsou sighs, louder this time.

"I *said* , it's not so bad. They don't do it often and I'd..." he runs a shaky hand through his hair, standing already messy hair into jagged points. "I'd rather it was *me* , than the other kids."

Izuku cannot fault him. He knows that choice; has made it for years—that he would rather take on the world, everything his father could have placed upon his skin before it *ever* touched his mother again.

(Izuku wonders if this empty helplessness is the same as the one his

mother carried through his childhood)

“T-that’s still not *right* , Shinsou!” Izuku takes a gulp of his water, trying to temper the heat of his anger in his chest.

Shinsou just nods, settling back into his side of the booth like the fight has fled from his bones and this is all he can do, face upturned to the ceiling. “I know it’s not. It’s just how things are.”

“A-and so they should stay that way?”

Shinsou adjusts his posture so he once again faces Izuku, carefully blank. “No,” he starts, words slow. “I don’t think they should.”

Izuku nods, already halfway trapped in a whirlwind of thoughts but he just nods again, twice in succession. He drains the last of his latter and jitters in place as he watches Shinsou cautiously follow his example.

They’ve run out of time with their cat by this time and when they finally exit the cafe in silence after paying, Izuku hooks an elbow through his taller friend’s arm and begins to drag the purple haired boy back the direction they came.

“Midoriya! Why are you dragging me?” Shinsou complains, though it’s barely a complaint when the other boy seems to be trying to hide a smile.

Izuku just grins, letting up the pressure on their hooked arms and falling into place next to his only friend.

“Mum said you have to walk me back and forth to school from now. And,” Izuku laughs, feeling surprisingly light of heart. “She wants to meet my best friend!”

Shinsou is still sporting the dazed grin when they stumble through the unit door, easily the most cheerful expression Izuku’s ever seen him make.

“Izuku! You’re back, I thought you would be longer!” His mother calls from the kitchen— there’s the smell of meat frying and Izuku feels his stomach rumbling, the apple still lying forgotten in his jacket pocket.

“Yeah, S-Shinsou and I are done so we decided to head back!” Izuku replies, as he and Shinsou toe off their shoes in the entryway and Izuku scrambles to find a clean set of guest slippers for his friend.

There’s a notable pause and then Izuku’s mother appears in the doorway of the kitchen, hands wiping off on a tea towel and smelling of detergent. She smiles, soft and surprised. “Oh, you must be Shinsou-kun! It’s so wonderful to meet you!”

Shinsou seems to be like most of the population— wide eyed and flustered under this mother’s warm kindness. Izuku knows how overbearing his mother can be— but for Shinsou, he thinks it’s just on the right side of caring.

“H-hello Midoriya-san.” He bows quickly. “Sorry for arriving without notice!”

She flaps a hand at that, dismissing it immediately. “Psh, please. None of that nonsense here and you’d best call me Inko! Too many

Midoriya's in this house for that!"

Izuku grins as his friends' cheeks dye deep red and it's surprisingly hilarious to see him stammer under his mother's tender mercies. "You're too thin, Shinsou-kun! You're to stay for lunch and I won't hear *anything* against it, okay? We have plenty." Inko gently guides Shinsou to their table, as Izuku sets it for three— the first time he's seen more than two sets out in this home and it feels *right* .

Just as right as watching Shinsou eat katsudon for the first time and the bright, *wide* smile that lights up Shinsou's face in a way Izuku's never really seen before.

It lights a familiar fire in the pit of Izuku's stomach and he basks in the warmth of it, hoping this contentment radiates from him.

Izuku catches his mother's eye and knows she has already pieced together little pieces of Shinsou's home life, from the wide eyed stare he points at the size of the bowl placed before him and what Izuku has told her before. She nods, small and unobtrusive, before turning back to Shinsou.

His friend won't know what to do with how much love Izuku knows his mother is capable of sharing.

# fallout part 3

## Chapter Summary

\*evil cackling\*

Posting early because tomorrow is my birthday!

Come yell at me!

## Discord

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

I love y'all, thank you for reading!

Breakfast the next morning is interrupted by the soft rap of knocks at the door, Izuku mid-bite of his toast as his mother bustles towards the door like she's planned this exact moment. With a glance at the clock, Izuku wonders who would be coming by this early. Shinsou wasn't meant to come by for at least another ten minutes— but when Izuku sees his friend at the door, he doesn't miss the hint of victory in his mother's smile.

“Ah... good morning, Inko-san. I'm here for Midoriya...?” Peeking through the doorway, Shinsou seems to spot him still at the breakfast table, confusion spread across his face. Izuku sees his mother step aside, giving Shinsou room to step inside. “You did say seven thirty, right?”

His mum laughs, waving the tall teen through into the entryway. “I did, but there's no point leaving for school this early! There's breakfast on the table, m-make yourself at home!”

Ah , Izuku thinks, *that's what's happening.*

Izuku doesn't know how to be like his mother in this way; that effortless, seamless transition from request to *expectation*. He's powerless against it when she aims it at him, and it would seem Shinsou is the same.

Midoriya Inko is a force of nature— not in the way of a storm or a cyclone or a whirl of hail; but in the way that weeds sprout up among paving stones and the wind shakes the trees. A natural, indomitable current that couldn't be denied.

Shinsou slides into the chair next to Izuku, face blank but he thinks the taller boy seems decidedly bemused. “M-Morning, Shinsou,” he greets, moving the water jug between them as he does so and gestures towards the toast in the middle of the table. “You're welcome to that.”

Shinsou glances between the empty plate set before him and the stack of toast— he reminds Izuku, not unkindly, of a dog too used to food being snatched from beneath him. The teen eyes the food like it will disappear if he reaches for it, and his hands remain steadfastly in his lap. “You sure? I don't want to intrude.”

Izuku snorts, then chuckles into his water glass. “Shinsou— my mum will be offended if you *don't* and then she'll spend the next fifteen minutes plying you with so much food that I'll have to *roll* you to school.” He smiles to make sure the other knows he's talking in jest, and nods towards the food. “She *wants* you to stay for breakfast and...” Izuku swallowed on his words for a brief moment, then smiled once again. “ *I* want you to stay too!”

Shinsou's gaze is dark— eyes shadowed by something Izuku can't get a grasp on before it's gone and he nods. Izuku politely ignores the way Shinsou's hands shake when he slowly reaches for a slice of toast from the stack, and how his friend pauses with every accidental clink of his butter knife against the crockery.

Instead, Izuku hands him the jam jar and grins. The tentative smile he gets in return is small— but it's *there* .

They eat in relative silence, just the occasional clink of their cups on the table and the muted sounds of eating. And Izuku finds it oddly hilarious that so much of their time together is spent eating, of all things. Izuku knows he started this with a bunch of rice balls that hadn't tasted all that good, but staring at Shinsou distractedly eating toast while scrolling on his phone is a whole new level.

He's pulled from his musing by the chime of his phone alarm and he crams the last of his toast into his mouth when he hears it. He wants to say he's an organised person— but he knows at least four of his school books are still spread out on his desk, and he has absolutely no idea where his school bag actually *is*.

But Izuku works well under pressure, so he scrambles to pack up his books as carefully as possible, sticky notes and spare sheets of paper carefully kept in place. He spots his bag under the edge of his bed, and drops down to his knees to reach under to grab it, when he hears a muted snort from the doorway.

He peeks up at his friend from the floor, grinning in embarrassment. "Hi Shinsou..."

The purple haired teen smirks in reply, weight braced on the doorframe and legs crossed as he stands. "You okay there, Midoriya? Anyone would think you weren't ready for school at all."

Izuku knows his friend is teasing— it doesn't stop the flush from rising up from his cheeks. "I just... totally forgot where my bag was and I'm so *bad* at k-keeping a track of it!" He whines a little, just frustrated about how his brain can remember literally everything about a hero and not important, day to day stuff. Like, say where he puts his bags



or his phone or even his *keys* .

Which are safely in his pocket, after a cursory self pat down and the jingle of metal on metal.

*'I wonder what Aldera would think now,'* is the thought whirling round and round in his, a seemingly endless barrage of 'what if's'.

He wonders if Bakugou had even noticed he had left, at first. Izuku spares a long, guilty-ridden moment to think of the poor soul the blond had inevitably turned his wrath on. He knows he shouldn't feel guilty for actions that aren't his fault, that he should lay that responsibility at the hands of the truly guilty—

But Izuku has a starburst of white on his side that *aches* when he thinks of the blond and he cannot help but think that he would rather suffer that again than let another person carry it.

Izuku is a canvas and he is all too willingly to let himself be covered, if it spares someone else being marked.

*( Izuku forgets that a canvas is but fabric, bound by wood and glue, just as fragile as anything else in the world )*

He's drawn back to the moment by a cough, eyes quickly flickering back to where Shinsou is no longer leaning against the door but is instead several steps closer. He looks— Izuku thinks he looks concerned, in some way— eyebrows pinched together, mouth open as if to ask something.

But the taller teen quickly shuts it again, tucking an outstretched hand

back into his pocket as if thinking better of it.

“You’ve been standing there for five whole minutes, you know. Is the floor *that* interesting?” Izuku doesn’t know if he’s imagining but there’s definitely a spark of *something* in Shinsou’s voice, buried between the dry snark and sarcasm.

“S-sorry, got lost in my b-brain for a bit! I h-have everything now!” Izuku got to his feet, grabbing the bag he’d shoved his class books into and zips it shut with a flourish. Shinsou is still watching him with sharp eyes, so Izuku smiles sheepishly and gestures to the doorway Shinsou is taking up. “C-can i get through? I need to brush my teeth before we go!”

Shinsou steps to the side, letting Izuku pass him in silence and he can feel the taller teen’s eyes following him down the hallway, all the way up until the wooden door shuts behind him. The back of his neck is prickling uncomfortably even with the barrier between them.

Something *else* had been looking out through Shinsou’s eyes and Izuku shudders.

He almost gets lost in thought just then, but manages to stay mostly in the present. He busies himself with brushing his teeth, almost gagging at the taste of the toothpaste on his tongue. He adjusts his binder, pulling at the curling edge with frustration but eventually, it lies flat.

Izuku eyes his unruly hair for a long moment and then dismisses thoughts of dragging his brush through it— it wouldn’t make any real difference anyway. His hair has been a lost cause ever since that first curl came through, or at least that was his mother’s long running joke.

Shinsou isn't standing by Izuku's bedroom door when he emerges, so he ducks in to grab his school blazer and the backpack stuffed to the brim off of his bed. Trotting down the stairs, he's greeted with Shinsou standing at the dinner table, seemingly glaring down at the wooden surface.

"Shinsou? What's up?" Izuku queries, placing his bag down next to where his mother has placed his premade bento from the night before.

"Midoriya, why are there two lunches?" Shinsou sounds like his teeth are gritted— Izuku is genuinely lost.

He tilts his head to one side. "Well, o-one is for me and the other is for you. Mum and I made them last night."

Shinsou's pale gaze flicks to meet him and Izuku swears his eyes are *wet* . But there's a blink between them, and next he sees, they are dry. A trick of the light, Izuku thinks.

( *but he knows what he saw* )

" *Why* is there one for me? I don't live here. I only met your mother last night; there's no reason for *me* to have one." There's a note of confusion that makes Izuku's chest tighten painfully. His friend sounds *lost* .

Izuku pauses in tucking his own lunch away, halfway through zipping the front pocket of his bag shut. "I-Is there food in your bag, Shinsou? Did your foster family send you with *anything* today?"

His friend slowly shakes his head, staring down once again at the dark

blue bento box and the cherry-red sticky note with ‘for you, Shinsou-kun! Please have a good day!’

It’s signed Inko and it’s followed by a smiley face. It’s the same message Izuku’s seen on every lunch he’s had made for him; and something tells him that Shinsou hasn’t ever had this before.

“Then there *is* a reason for you to have it,” he pushes the bento into his friend’s hands, brushing his fingertips over the sticky note and the smiley face. Shinsou glances down at him, eyes flat but his face is tense.

“You need it, don’t you?” Shinsou takes the food and Izuku politely ignores the way his hands *tremble* . Instead, he smiles softly.

It’s the most *real* Izuku has felt in months, and the answering, shaky smile Shinsou sends him feels real too.

Shinsou pauses as he tucks the food away, hands stilling on the zipper. Izuku feels his gaze on him, heavy across his shoulders. “If we’re hanging out more— you should probably call me Hitoshi.”

Izuku freezes. He doesn’t remember anyone ever asking him to use their first names— just remembers children who recoiled at his very presence, who demanded that he not even use their names in the first place.

*(Except for Kacchan, something treacherous whispers from the black mass in his chest )*

Izuku gapes, he can’t help himself. “A-are you s-sure? P-please don’t

joke about that if you a-are...”

Shinsou blinks, nonplussed. “I’m serious. If you want to use it, you can.”

Izuku can feel water building up in the corners of his eyes, dampening his cheeks and he rubs at them with the sleeve of his blazer. There’s a hand on his shoulder, hesitant but warm, anchoring him down again.

“I didn’t mean to upset you, Midoriya—“ Shinsou starts, clearly uncomfortable and Izuku chuckles wetly.

“N-no, it’s fine. I’ve just n-never had a friend ask me to call by their first name before! S-so...” he grabs the damp end of his blazer and dabs at his cheeks once again, smiling widely. “So you’d best call me Izuku!”

Shinsou— *Hitoshi* smiles back; that slightly scary, toothy one that Izuku knows is *real* and nods. “Then let’s get going, Izuku. We’re gonna be late.”

Izuku glances at the clock and winces, cursing under his breath as he darts to the door and grabs his shoes as quickly as he possibly can. Hitoshi hunkers down next to him to slip his own and though Izuku is stressed—

There’s something nice about not being alone.

..✧□□□□□ ◡ □□□□□ ✧..

It's a block out from the school that Hitoshi stops him, out of sight of their school and Izuku almost runs into his back. He's opening his mouth to ask, wondering if he's seen a cat and they should stop.

But Hitoshi spins around on the spot, like his feet are moving before he can control them. Izuku can't hold back a flinch when both of his hands land on his shoulders, the movement too sudden to account for.

Hitoshi loosens his grip when he sees, resting his warm palms just barely on his skin. Izuku's heart stops it's uphill climb towards panic, the feeling of being restrained fading with every breath afterwards.

But Hitoshi's face is still determined— flat and serious. “Izuku,” he starts, softly— if he's trying to find the right words. Then his face tightens again, cheeks taut. “You get harassed, you tell me. You get heckled, you tell me. Anyone lays a *single hand* on you— you *tell me* ? Got it?”

Izuku can't even function under Hitoshi's gaze, the determination lighting up the subtle, pale gold. The sunlight catches him in such a way that his face is lined in wan morning light and deep shadows.

( *he looks like something out of his mother's mythos book* )

“Do you understand, Izuku? You *tell* me,” and when had Hitoshi's hands started to shake against his shoulders?

Izuku finds himself nodding, drawn into orbit around the sun that is his friend's presence— for once, it feels like safety.

It seems to be enough for Hitoshi, who lets go of his shoulders like he hadn't meant to grab them in the first place and his cheeks growing heated. "Sorry, I shouldn't have grabbed you like that."

Izuku shakes his head as they begin to walk their final block to the school. "Don't w-worry about it!"

There's a cacophony of noise building up in front of them, filling the morning air as they round the final corner to their school. Izuku cannot help the way his feet freeze to the sidewalk, anchoring him so firmly to the concrete he isn't sure he will ever be able move again.

The gate to the school is *packed* , reporters milling about— they're here for *him* .

Hitoshi curses as he sees them, already digging through his bag and drawing out a long length of grey cloth with no small amount of difficulty from the bottom. He loops the grey scarf carefully around Izuku's shoulders, burying the lower half of his face in soft fabric that smells like soap and fresh linen.

He's still got his nose buried in the fabric when Hitoshi jams a beanie on his head as well, effectively rendering Izuku unrecognisable and the taller boy steps back to peruse his handiwork. Seemingly satisfied, he rubs his hands together and shrugs his backpack back into his shoulders.

"That should do it."

Izuku doesn't trust his mouth with speech, so he nods shakily and follows his friend towards the throng of people crowding the school entrance.

It's an awful thing, packed in with people on every side, knowing they're here to find *him* , that they are here because they think they deserve to know what happened in a house they hadn't cared about before now. They're here because they are *parasites*, looking for the weakest link like a bird before a worm hole.

It lights something hot and angry in his chest, and he presses his hand deeper into where Hitoshi has grabbed it, lets his friend drag through the mass of bodies in front of them and shuts his eyes against it all.

He doesn't open them until he's in the school proper, as Hitoshi pulls them towards their shoe lockers.

And for the second time that day, Izuku runs into Hitoshi's back as he stops suddenly.

"Izuku, don't open your eyes."

But it's too late, and Izuku has already peered around him to see—

To see the familiar red and white of spider lilies stuffed into his shoe locker, like a florist has coughed up into it with their entire stock. There are flowers in Hitoshi's box too, some torn and shredded around them.

Izuku feels his shoulders shake, as though he is miles away from the sensation— he doesn't even know where he is anymore, only that there are flowers filling up every inch of his vision.



His vision is blurring and sound reaches him through an echo, like he is far underwater and the pressure is pressing down on chest. He cannot *breathe*— an iron band is tightening around his chest, pulling tight around his ribs and his heart is jammed against them, jackrabbiting against bone and pressure. It feels like it will burst through his bones and clean through his skin.

The red is everywhere and he smells sugar burning. There is caramel scorched, burning in the air and he cannot breathe—

He heaves a breath into his burning lungs, one that reminds his body that he needs oxygen and he is dizzy with the influx. Fresh air brings clarity to his brain and with it, understanding.

Tears pour over his cheeks and they drip onto the hands in front of him. But his skin isn't wet?

Oh.

Hitoshi's hand is pressed against his chest, and he can feel fabric pressed under his right hand. There's the gentle rise and fall of movement and breath beneath his touch, the flutter of a heartbeat beneath his fingers and finally, Izuku lets the distance between his brain and body fade.

“—ou're near the shoe lockers. You're safe here. There's no one else in this corridor. It's Monday, roughly eight thirty in the morning. Class starts soon. The weather outside is warm for this time of year, and there's no real breeze right now. Izuku, you just need to breathe. You can follow mine, just like that, yeah.” Hitoshi sounds like he's on a loop, like he's repeated all these words at least and Izuku finds himself leaning into the hand on his chest.

He lets oxygen slowly sink back into his veins, head spinning with oxygen deprivation and dizzy from suddenly having it back again. But he breathes, matches every inhale with the rise and fall of Hitoshi's chest beneath his fingers.

"You back with me, Izuku?"

Izuku realises Hitoshi speaking to him, and probably has been for a few moments. It seems to take an eternity for his tongue to move from the floor of his mouth. He manages a hum of noise, and a slight nod of his head. It's like moving through molasses.

"Okay, that's good. Are you okay to sit here for a second? I'm going to clean up the... all of this." Izuku nods mechanically, watching as Shinsou gathers up the mass of red and white in his arms. He stalks off down the corridor, frame tense and Izuku finds himself alone, staring at the crushed red petals on the corridor floor.

It's eerily familiar and Izuku struggles to remember where he is. Tokage Junior High might be far away from Aldera but seems as though they might as well be the same place for all that Izuku knows. Except:

Hitoshi appears back in view, face tight and stressed. There is anger lining the creases of his eyes, dark rimmed with lack of sleep and for a second, there is something else in the frame of his body. Izuku knows something is looking out through his friend's eyes, something cold and flat.

He shudders and when he looks up at Hitoshi, it is gone. When his friend reaches a hand out to help him up, Izuku stares at it for a long moment and nods, taking it.

He's going to need everything he can get to make it through today.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Hitoshi finds him staring down at the paper he finds among the flowers, poised to dump them in the bin around the corner.

He's never considered himself an angry person, not in the ordinary sense of the word. He's bitter, cold to the world that has torn him down ever since he knew he could stand. There has never been anyone to hold him up, no foundation to base his own strength.

*(nobody has ever taught Hitoshi how to stand and he has learned it all his own)*

So Hitoshi has spent a decade building his own, erecting a fortress on the sand and the silt of a river bed. There is nothing to hold up his determination except his own grip on gravity, there has never been anything to hold him down.

Except now there is.

He's always promised himself that he wouldn't do this. There's a *reason* he loves the street cats. They are fierce and solitary and they care *nothing* for those who left them behind; they do not forgive, hold tight to the grudges against those who hurt them.

Hitoshi loves them because he *is* them. He sleeps beneath a roof, in a bed but he has never had a home.

Except he does.

In the quiet moments on the rooftop, on the sun warmed concrete; sitting at a dining table in a home that isn't his and a bento with his name on it.

Hitoshi doesn't know when the space between him and Izuku became the closest he has to a home but it is *now* .

So the paper between his hands, singed at the edges and warped by his grip on it.

*'villain scum'*

He will make sure Izuku never sees this.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

The classroom falls immediately silent when they come through the door, and there is nothing. No sound, not even an intake of breath.

Izuku finds his seat with blurry eyes and when he sits down, can only stare blankly at his desk.

The word villain spawn has been scrawled in vivid red marker against the wood, so soaked in with ink that Izuku knows it will take ages to remove. Red ink stains faster than black after all.

He's numb, even as tears hit the desk.

Nobody approaches them and Izuku doesn't know if the trade off is worth the heavy, dark eyes on from them from every corner of the room.

( *Izuku wants to disappear* )

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Izuku lets his feet carry him past the road that leads to his home when they leave the school. He knows Hitoshi is still following him, has promised his mother to see him safely home.

But Izuku has somewhere to be, and something to do, and it will not wait.

“Izuku, your street was back there. There's no way this leads to your house. We need to go back.” Hitoshi has a hand tangled in Izuku's blazer, a gentle tug to make him stop.

When Izuku glances up, Hitoshi's gaze is sharp and his face is lined with worry. “We really need to get back. If someone sees you...”

Izuku shakes his head, tugging on the straps of his backpack. “I-I really need to go somewhere. You can come, it's not far.”

Hitoshi dithers on the spot, clearly trying to make the right decision but eventually nods. The expression on his face doesn't ease away, but instead grows darker. The gold in his eyes is bright in the sunlight.

“Okay, we go there and then we go back. I promised your mum I'd get you back safe.” Izuku just nods in reply, feet already itching to move again. His mind is burning, neurons firing rapid pace inside his skull and there is no reprieve. He has been caught in a loop of anger and numbness all day— and the anger is winning out.

So he drags his friend through the gap in the fencing and down the narrow, prey-pressed grass trail and past the rotten bark and mulch corpse of the former tree bridge.

Hitoshi balks at the sight of the altar, tugging at Izuku's sleeve as if to stop him and the motion feels desperate against his sleeve as Izuku brushes it off.

“Izuku, stop, that's not your altar! You need to *stop*— “

He doesn't know what he expects himself to say when he falls to his knees before the white stones. He expects himself to cry, to be numb—Izuku doesn't know *how* to be angry.

But the white-hot magma crawling out of his lungs and out of his mouth knows how.

“I've been coming here, everyday for six weeks now. I've sat in front of your damned rocks and brought you offerings because I *cared dammit* and now— I think I've made the connections. What was it about me? I know you've claimed others—“

Izuku finds himself falling quiet, anger deep in his bones and it burns through his marrow. It leaves him tired— there is nothing left for his anger to burn through and it dies, ashes on his tongue. He can hear the intake of breath behind him but he has almost forgotten Hitoshi is there.

“Why claim *him* and not *me* ? Why do you call yourself an oathbreaker, when w-what you really meant was ***liar***. ”

# fallout part 4

## Chapter Notes

\*evil cackling\*

Yet again, have a surprise update! I spent part of my birthday writing this angst for y'all! And I just couldn't wait until Sunday so I had to post it now!

Come yell at me!

## Discord

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

Love y'all <3

## Previously:

*“Izuku, stop, that’s not your altar! You need to stop—“*

*He doesn’t know what he expects himself to say when he falls to his knees before the white stones. He expects himself to cry, to be numb— Izuku doesn't know how to be angry.*

*But the white-hot magma crawling out of his lungs and out of his mouth knows how.*

*“I’ve been coming here, everyday for six weeks now. I’ve sat in front of your damned rocks and brought you offerings because I cared dammit and now— I think I’ve made the connections. What was it about me? I know you’ve claimed others—“*



*Izuku finds himself falling quiet, anger deep in his bones and it burns through his marrow. It leaves him tired— there is nothing left for his anger to burn through and it dies, ashes on his tongue.*

*“Why claim them and not me? Why do you call yourself an oathbreaker, when w-what you really meant was liar.”*

..◆□□□□□ □ □□□□□◆..

Izuku should've predicted this, he really should have.

It only makes *sense* , after all. It makes total, complete, *logical* sense. And Izuku wants to crush it ruthlessly under his heel, turn it to *dust* and forget he ever realised the truth.

**“You ask questions you do not want answers for, Midoriya Izuku,”** there's that voice again, a coiled shadow detached from the darkness of the hillside and it slinks around the white stones. It brings that spitting, howling fury back from the chasm of his chest: there's a hearth fire burning in the space between his ribs and he is helpless against it. **“Yet you already know the answers. What do you ask of me, empty platitudes?”**

Izuku clenches his jaw so tightly his teeth grate, the sensation sending uncomfortable shivers along his jawbone and up to his neck. His ears ache at the sudden pressure and his lips curl up in an expression he knows he has learned from Bakugou. It is so easy to be angry when all he has known is *rage* .

**“What do I *want*? !”** Izuku seethes, flinging a hand to where Hitoshi

stands to the side of him— Hitoshi, whose hands are clenched so tightly around themselves that Izuku can see the white of his skin. His eyes are flaring vivid, white-hot gold— they are *glowing* in the shade. “I w-want answers, Loki! Because that’s who you are, r-right? A trickster god, one who obviously thought my entire existence was one g-great, stinking, *cosmic farce* !”

He jabs one trembling finger in the direction of Hitoshi once again, unsure if the earthquake in his body is fury or despair. “I-I want to know why you have claimed Hitoshi and n-not me! Is it because I’m not *blessed* with a quirk? I’m not *powerful* enough to earn your regard and instead I have to live as something less than human, something stuck to the bottom of their shoes?!”

Izuku knows all of these things are his truths, his own personal veritas — it doesn’t mean the forceful pull from their hiding places in his bones doesn’t burn. He has hidden them there, buries them beneath sinew and tendon, hoping that the strength of his mortal flesh would be enough to hold these aching, melancholic truth hostage.

So Izuku weeps, sweeping a hand across his burning eyes and feels the inevitable hiccup of breath building up in his throat.

“I just want to know why you said you were trying to spare me suffering when I have done *nothing but suffer*! Why did I have to g-go through all of this just to find o-out even the one who *chose* me doesn’t *want me*!?!” Izuku’s throat hurts, tight and raw. He hasn’t raised his voice like this in years: learned long ago that his *anger* and *fury* and *pain* had no place in the world of sound.

There’s something cathartic in this release, pulling the plug on all of his built up suffering— laying it at the feet of a god who could’ve prevented it all.

There's nothing in response, just the rustle of the rustle of the trees in the window and the shifting, nervous sounds Hitoshi makes behind him.

Izuku can only watch as the shadow in front of him stretches, a formless shape of void against the hillside. But when a hot, smoke-tinged wind whips through the clearing— he finds himself blinded for long moments; the scorching, dry heat too much for him to bear keeping his eyes open.

The shadow is gone when he opens his eyes— instead there is a man.

At least, it takes the form of a man but Izuku knows this is no mortal. *Loki* leans against the hillside, framed in gold light that has no source. He is beautiful in a way that is beyond beauty, though every time Izuku attempts to look away and tries to remember what he looked like, there is nothing but the golden light.

He leans against the hillside, like he owns the ground beneath his feet. Izuku certainly isn't willing to challenge him, considering his vitriol is what has brought him into this situation.

**“There is a point at which all beings deserve truth— a trickster god knows this, *must* know it to be who they are,”** comes the voice of lightning bound in a bottle, words full with the ache of a hearth fire ember. **“ This is that point. Sit beside your friend, Shinsou Hitoshi, for this tale is not an easy one.”**

Izuku can only stare as the *god* across from him settles to his knees like he is kneeling on a pillow of finest linen and not in the dirt at the behest of two mortals. Hitoshi falls into place next to him like a puppet with its strings cut, and Izuku cannot help but reach out to tangle their hands together.

The instantaneous tight grip of Hitoshi's long fingers against his is a welcome sensation.

**“Storytellers have always been my domain: the poets and the scholars, the authors and those who understand the true power of words. There is,”** a pause, a twist of a face full of terrible beauty. **“I admit, a power that sorcery cannot wield, a prize that brute force cannot procure. Do you know what it is?”**

Izuku cannot move his head, cannot calm his heart down from the rabbit-fast dash it is making inside his chest. But Loki seems to know it regardless. Maybe Hitoshi manages to move his head— Izuku cannot tear his eyes away from his patron far enough to see it.

**“It is loyalty, little mortals.”** There's a cold sort of smugness to the way Loki's lips twist. **“No pain can buy loyalty by force, no sorcery truly able to ensnare the heart in the way that a handful of well placed words and songs can. But,”** Loki sighs, dark eyes burning out of a mantle of gold and white and framed by a helm of burnished metal. **“Our words also bind us, keep us hostages to our vows. And in such a way, I found myself bound to an oath from which there could be no breaking free.”**

Izuku feels something like a cold wash fall over him, like he is sinking slowly beneath the ice of a frozen river.

Hitoshi's hand shakes in his grasp.

**“W-what deal?”** Izuku manages to make his numb, heavy tongue respond after an eternity of stillness. **“What o-oath could have bound you l-like that?”**

Loki has eyes that never settle on any one colour— Izuku watches rust and copper and viridian and carmine and sulfur flash through the gaze that turns to him, pins him in place. He cannot remember what the man looks like, though he sits in front of him, just that he is the most resplendent thing that has ever existed on earth and all the realms between them.

**“An oath to the most powerful god in Japan— Amaterasu. An oath that my power would always be hers, to put everything at my disposal at her command.”** Loki lounges against the hillside, hands tracing the white stones of his altar like he is stroking a house cat. The white marble shines gold-white under his touch. **”We made a bet on something, a blink of time ago for us but *centuries* for you — and I lost, so the oath was her winnings.”**

Izuku remembers the impression of teeth, bared white and sharp— hazy in his mind as if he had seen them through smoked glass. The sensation of Hitoshi’s skin against his own is the only thing keeping him grounded, anchors him down into the ground. “W-why couldn’t you b-break it back t-then?”

It’s not Izuku who asks. Hitoshi speaks up for the first time before Izuku had raged at the altar, and Izuku feels a sudden rush of guilt for dragging his friend into this. He wonders if Loki has ever spoken to his friend, whether this is the first real interaction the teen has had with his patron— wonders whether he has ruined this for his friend as well. The thought sends ice creeping along his veins.

**“Do not worry, Midoriya Izuku. You have not angered me— it is the way of your kind, to demand answers to perceived injustices and in this place, perhaps you are indeed owed them.”** Izuku finds himself seeing more and more of the deity before them, his mind finally remembering when he glances away. He’s heard of this— gods walk among them, everyone knows this and some come to their major holidays, glow brightly for their followers and bring a blessing for their lands.

He just hadn't expected a deity to answer his tantrum, his *hissy fit*, with a goddamned physical manifestation.

**"I was not strong enough among these lands— so I built my following and eventually removed myself from her influence. Perhaps it would be forty winters in your lands, maybe it was more. When she realised it..."** there was a pregnant pause, like the deity is mulling over his words. His voice rumbles at a pitch that makes Izuku's jaw ache, stretching up to his ears.

**"When she realised it, she took away what she could from me— my followers. I know Shinsou Hitoshi has told you of the burnings— the *deseccration* of my holy places..."** There is a rage, a roiling sea of anger in that voice— his face becomes dark and lightning cracks across the rocks beneath his hands for a brief instant.

The air stinks of ozone and burning grass.

**"These things were the consequences for tricking a goddess, one whom held far more sway than I had ever anticipated."** And at this, Izuku feels the crux of the story coming, feels it in the lure of a story well spun.

**"And thirteen years ago, in the shadow of the summer equinox, an *ultimatum* . Amaterasu came before me, cloaked in sunlight— she is cruel but *beautiful*, mortals. She could clap her hands and half of Japan would climb to their feet for a glimpse."** Loki leans forward, fingers tracing the stones like he can see something upon them, a map leading to a great, *terrible* future. **"She came to offer me a truce— that she would return me to my power if I would but refuse to claim anyone for a stretch of time."**

Izuku finds himself able to breathe, air stuttering into his lungs like rushing water and he is unsure whether he is drowning or if he is

coming to the surface.

**“There was someone she *wanted* , desired strongly enough to pardon the breaking of an oath. But,” The god *grins* , wide and sharp— he looks seconds from devouring something. “I would not be Loki if I did not do what Loki does— and she *burned* my places, *took* from me!”**

Izuku sucks air between his teeth, fills his lungs with oxygen that tastes like ash and meat cooking over the hearth, like ozone crackling in the air. “A-and?”

**“And so I *took* what she wanted— a child born after midsummer. A child who sits before me, asking questions to which he does not *want* answers to.”**

*Oh .*

“S-so you claimed me because s-someone *else* wanted me? Not because y-y-you...”

Izuku has twisted up his hope in this, he realises with a dread that feels like grief. He’d sworn to himself, *swore* up and down that he hadn’t invested anything of himself in this exchange. He’s been here, day after day, washed soil from the stones each afternoon and he’s spoken aloud his entire *life* to this deity who—

Who Izuku had thought wanted him.

Midoriya Izuku made himself a promise, a long time ago. One he

swore never to break, an oath to tuck beneath his heart and keep it from shattering beyond recognition.

Izuku had sworn to never hope for things he could never have.

And in this moment, a shift in time— he realises he has slowly broken it.

He laughs, softly under his breath and then louder when it devolves into hysteria. His cheeks are wet and there is no mirth in his laughter. He smudges a dirt smeared palm against his cheeks, scrubs at his leaking eyes like he can stem the flow of water.

“O-of course you didn’t *want* me.”

**“No, not at first. But, when I claimed you— Amaterasu tried to burn you to death before I could complete it and I couldn’t help but be curious. She wanted you so much she would risk *nobody* claiming you if she could not.”**

The reply hurts more than it should.

**“But now you have piqued my interest. So I offer to you, a boon. You can have anything I have power to give— if you should wish it, there is power in palms. If you should wish it, there is money and power and prestige and all of your worldly dreams. You need only state it, and it is within my power.”** The man, or the mockery of human form held up by godly strings lean forward once again, hands glowing bright. **“You have tended my altar when all others had abandoned me. Ask of me your desires.”**



It feels heady— the lure of heat and power drawing him forward to the hands reaching for him. This is everything he has ever wanted, everything he has *dreamed* of.

This is his every waking dream, every night time hoping, the summation of everything he has ever wanted. He could ask for anything— *anything*. He could ask for a quirk. He could ask for power, for everything that has been denied him.

(But it does not feel **right**. The thought tastes bitter on his tongue.)

Something dark and sinuous unfurls in his chest, a mass of shadow that coils around his tell-tale guilty heart. It moves like a house cat, sits around his still heart like it owns it and when the anger crashes into his system, he is not shocked. There is no heat, no hearth fire burning below his ribs.

This anger is all *his* .

“W-what do I *want* ?” He shudders, climbs to his feet without meaning to. He looms over the altar, and the god who eyes him with curiosity. “I want to *never have* known this, that story, *y-you!* You abandoned those w-who *needed* you, you bet my life, Hitoshi’s life, *all of our lives* for power and amusement— and for **nothing** !”

He heaves one shuddering breath through his lungs, like bellows shot full of holes and he is bleeding out from all sides. He feels like he should be dying but every breath reminds him that this is real.

He had been hoping it was a dream.

“I don’t w-want your *pity!* ”

“It is a gi-“

“I don’t want your *g-gift*. I want my *life* back!”

He finds his feet back-pedalling, away from the white stones, away from the deity watching him with sharp teeth and eyes golden in the sunlight. He looks like the monster in his dreams: the one that drags him, kicking and screaming, into a future of pain.

( *Izuku knows you should always run from monsters that **look** human* )

For the second time in a year, Izuku flees the clearing like the devil is hot on his heels and he leaves Hitoshi behind him.

..✧□□□□□ □ ◡ □□□□□ ✧..

Or so he thinks.

Hitoshi catches up to him less than a minute later, just as Izuku collapses against the chain-link fence of the old construction site. He’s distantly aware that he is hyperventilating, in that same way that he knows his heart is beating even when he doesn’t focus on it.

“H-holy shit I just yelled at a *god* oh god oh god oh god I’m gonna get rejected, he’s gonna *smite me* —“

“ *Hey Izuku?*”

“I j-just threw away my life! I’m gonna die, I can’t b-believe I let myself hope for anything, I just followed along l-like something was going to *change*— “

“*Izuku?*”

He turns to Hitoshi, eyes wide and breath quick. “Y-yeah H’toshi?”

“Sit down and take deep breaths for five minutes.”

And suddenly, Izuku does.

The fog over his mind is comforting: calm and cool, dampening everything. His thoughts feel far away, something else directing the flow of his mind. He doesn’t *have* to exist in those long moments, where Hitoshi’s quirk yanks away the controls and he just feels his lungs filling without his own efforts behind it.

He loves this feeling— loves being a passenger in his own body, content to watch himself from afar. It’s nicer to exist outside of himself, when he can.

But all good things end.

When Izuku finds himself back in control, his body trembles— he feels like he is going to fall apart.

Hitoshi is crouched in front of him, hands on Izuku's knees and his eyes are focused on his face, like he's been watching it for quite some time.

“That was a bad panic attack.”

Hitoshi's voice is shaking just as badly as his hands against Izuku's knees, but he manages to sound somewhat composed.

The sound that crawls out of Izuku's throat is significantly less composed: a whining, pitiful sound. He presses his hands tight against his eyes, hiding most of his face from view as he feels the panic sitting dormant just below his skin.

“Real bad, if you're still non verbal after a five minute check out. Do you need more time?”

Izuku thinks about it for a long minute, about ceding control just for another little moment of calm. He wants it, more than he *should* . He shakes his head, because he knows that even the things that feel good when he is like this aren't necessarily *good* for him in the long run.

And he feels he owes his friend quite a few answers at this point.

“Okay. I can wait, Izuku.”

The shaking in Hitoshi's hands tells Izuku another story. He shifts to place his hands on top of them, the sensation of warm skin beneath his hands a welcome anchor into the present.

The fog of his panic is finally lifting, the edges of his world clear once again and with it, the full sensation of his own body.

Including his emotions.

Including his *anger*.

He's so tired of being angry, he decides in this exhausted moment. He wants to be calm, to give up but the anger burns deep in his chest, forcing him to constantly fight against a current deadset on sweeping him away from everything he wants.

And isn't it ironic that it's now, moments after rejecting Loki's boon, that the desire to follow his dreams burns even hotter.

"I-I should've t-told you, m'sorry."

Hitoshi only glances at him, hands still under Izuku's own. "What for?"

"About the altar, about n-not being godless. I lied to you, e-even if it was by omission." Izuku can't bear to look up, even when Hitoshi's hands tighten on his and he instead watches the ground, noting the shadows of trees moving in the periphery of his vision.

“I don’t care about that. I would... I would like to know why you denied the boon? Is that...” Hitoshi trails off, voice soft.

Izuku nods, shifting a little so that he can give Hitoshi room to sit beside him.

“I-I’m *tired* of p-people not wanting me, of *using* me. I didn’t ask to be a *lynchpin* ! I j-just— I just wanted to be *safe* , to be **wanted** ! A-and everyone else gets that by *default* !”

“I want you.”

“And I just—“ Izuku pauses, mind slow to find equilibrium. “... what?”

Hitoshi turns to him, eyes lit by the sun and Izuku can see the gold at this angle. “I said, I want you. I’ve lived knowing no one wanted me. Until you decided that the right thing to do was to help me.”

The ***right*** thing to do.

Izuku might’ve thrown away his future, his dreams out of spite—

But he can still do the right thing.

“I... you l-looked like you needed help.”

Hitoshi eyes him, an unreadable look in his gaze. “You look like you need help as well.”

Izuku doesn’t know what to say to that— except the truth.

“Maybe I do.”

# fallout part 5

## Chapter Notes

Alrighty heck I'm changing update days to Fridays/Saturdays because I barely ever post on Sundays anyway ahshshs

Enjoy (:

Come yell at me!

This chapter contains implications of suicidal idealisation and intent to commit suicide, very briefly. Please take care

## Discord

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## PREVIOUSLY:

The **right** thing to do.

*Izuku might've thrown away his future, his dreams out of spite—*

*But he can still do the right thing.*

*"I... you l-looked like you needed help."*



*Hitoshi eyes him, an unreadable look in his gaze. “You look like you need help as well.”*

*Izuku doesn’t know what to say to that— except the truth.*

*“Maybe I do.”*

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

CHP 10

It’s late by the time they stumble back to Izuku’s unit— the sun has well and truly set, only a red glow along the horizon to indicate it was ever there in the first place.

If the sky had flipped on its axis and the sun had disappeared forever, Izuku isn’t even sure that he would know the difference.

His entire world has finally inverted, after a decade of a slow slide.

It began with his father, with a man who hurt them just because he *could* and the axis of his world had *shifted* . Nothing could be the same after that point— because Izuku was quirkless and godless and *useless*.

“You’re not useless.”

Hitoshi tugs him up the stairway, his grip growing tighter for a moment. They pause on the landing of Izuku's unit, frozen in the moment. Izuku doesn't even remember getting here, doesn't know which streets they took and he's just thankful Hitoshi apparently remembers well enough how to bring him home.

He must've been speaking out loud, muttering— it feels like an aeon since he last mumbled, a habit well abandoned over the last decade. Between Bakugou and Salamander, there had been no room for error and muttering— muttering was an *error* .

“Izuku?”

He blinks up at Hitoshi, eyes blurry. His cheeks sting cold in the breeze, and he belatedly realises that he is crying. “Y-yes?”

Hitoshi pauses, opens his mouth to say something and then shakes his head, seemingly thinking better of it. “Let's get you inside.”

The inside of the unit is a rush of warmth when he opens the door— and the smell of pork baking rushes out with it, making Izuku's stomach growl. He doesn't know if he ate lunch at all that day, even though his bento is empty when he places it in the kitchen. Hitoshi follows him closely, taking out his own empty bento and murmuring a soft thanks to Izuku's mother.

His mother, who is watching him like a hawk.

He collapses into a dining chair, like a puppet with its string cut— he feels directionless, aimless. So much of his life has been spent hoping

and then denying that hope, a push and pull of constant flux between his dreams and his reality.

And he has shattered the weights, torn down the pulley system of his life— there is no pragmatism to drag him down, no hope to lift him up in turn. The wheel that has pulled his life forward until this point is broken, and Izuku flounders in the absence of his routine.

Hitoshi's hand is still looped around his wrist, fingers pressed to his pulse as if by instinct. Izuku wonders what kind of life gives you the instincts to check for vital signs.

And Izuku remembers sitting in front of Present Mic, those long six months ago, with his hand pressed against his mother's pulse point and realises he already knows *exactly* what kind of life builds that instinct.

So he turns his hand, twines his fingers with Hitoshi's, and doesn't let go.

"Izuku, baby? What's wrong?"

He wants to lie. Izuku wants to *lie* to his mother, and say there's nothing wrong. That the day was just stressful because of the press leak and he was just tired, that he'd be fine after a nap. Izuku has been through worse than this— he always bounces back, right?

Instead Izuku places his head against his mother's shoulder and lets his weight sag into the contact. He loses himself in the long moments of trying to breathe properly, grounds himself in the motion of a hand running through his hair.

Hitoshi is asking him something, voice softer than Izuku has ever heard and he turns his head to face him. Their hands are still entwined and the motion of Hitoshi's thumb against his pulse is an anchor weighing him down— a welcome respite.

“Do you want me to tell her, Izuku?”

*Does he?*

Izuku doesn't know, floating between thoughts. There is no storm-tossed sea in his mind— his anxiety does not carry him up to a crest and crashing down in a trough. Instead he floats on thoughts as smooth as spun glass.

Does he want his mother to know that even a deity didn't want him? That the child she loves was almost killed by a deity who only wanted to possess him. Izuku has suffered for *nothing*.

He nods, face still pressed against his mother's shoulder, the pink fabric of her cardigan turned dark with his crying. His cheeks are still wet but Izuku can barely feel the tears.

“Izuku? We're going to move to the couch, okay?” His mother leans back as she speaks, trying to make eye contact as Izuku wipes at his face with his free hand and takes one long, stuttering breath. He nods, not trusting his voice— the pressure of fingers against his holds the dissociation back just enough for him to think through it.

Izuku wonders why they always do these things on the couch, in the living room— he wonders how many tragedies it will take for him to associate their couch with the shifting tides of his own life. It will take

years for him to remember that slamming doors are not things to be afraid of, that the shift of floor boards in the night is not the footsteps of the monster that had lived in their home.

His mother sits where Present Mic had sat only days before and the irony is not lost on Izuku. They keep repeating this: this twisted cycle of recovery and upheaval. It feels like Hisashi had never left, even though he had never touched this couch or these walls.

“I don’t want to push, honey...” Inko wrings her hands nervously in her lap, fingers twisting into the fabric of her skirt and then smoothing it down again. “But... but you’re worrying me and Shinsou-kun...”

Izuku should feel embarrassed of the way he flinches away from the thought of the truth, of even letting his mind wander to gods and deities and monsters that wore human skins. He feels Hitoshi stiffen momentarily as Izuku turns in against his side but it passes, the tension bleeding out of Hitoshi’s torso. The weight of his arm settles across Izuku’s shoulders— hesitant, like Hitoshi doesn’t know how he’s supposed to offer physical comfort.

It implies Hitoshi doesn’t remember *receiving* physical comfort and it lights up a muted, distant rage inside Izuku’s chest. He knows he will feel more later— but for now, it simmers.

“We...we took a detour, after school. Izuku wanted to do something and I didn’t want to leave him alone. I promised to get him back here safely...” Hitoshi pauses, coughing dryly and Inko jumps up, as if by instinct.

She ducks into the kitchen and returns momentarily with three glasses of water balanced between her hands. Hitoshi takes his with a quiet thanks, and Izuku watches the condensation on the glass slowly forming.

Inko's gaze is wide, as she takes in the vacancy in Izuku's eyes. "You went to the altar."

Hitoshi can only nod, eyes staring into the distance, voice faint.

"We went to the altar."

..◆□□□□□ □ □□□□◆..

Hitoshi doesn't know what has happened in the last twenty four hours but his entire world has changed.

He wants to say that he is a collected person— he's lived his life at the mercy of adults who don't *care* . He lives in a world where the only way to survive was to go with the flow— standing up for yourself built you a reputation, and Hitoshi *came* with a reputation. He can't afford to add more to his plate, cannot afford to risk yet another somewhat stable group home over something as simple as missed meals.

Missing food was just part of life, the casual shoves in the hallway were part of life, the sight of a belt driving his heart into a hummingbird fever was just *part of life* .

*(Until someone had looked at him with wide, sad eyes and Hitoshi remembers those things don't **have to be**)*

Hitoshi has lived and survived this way by being nothing. He says nothing, asks for nothing, wants for nothing, *hopes* for nothing. Shinsou Hitoshi builds his life around emptiness and nothingness. He has nothing for them to take away—

Had.

Shinsou Hitoshi has found someone to keep and he now has something he can *lose* : the thought fills him with dread.

“We went to the altar.”

Inko’s face falls to where her son is half curled across Hitoshi’s torso, hand still where it grips the fabric of his shirt. “He told me he had given up on that forgotten god...”

There’s something dark and angry in her gaze for a split second, gone when Hitoshi attempts to look closer. “He’s been going there for weeks, apparently. He... Izuku seemed angry, about something. It seems that we share a patron: though..” He gestured to his eyes, tilting them at the exact angle he has learned will reflect light perfectly into the gold filled cracks of his eyes. “I did not know Loki made a habit of claiming and not marking.”

It fills his chest with something cold— Hitoshi has always trusted his patron, trickster though he was. He’s always implicitly, blindly trusted the deity who had taught him the effects of his quirk, albeit in a rough fashion. He has always been *grateful* for his patronage and yet—

Midoriya Izuku had cracked straight down the middle with grief, eyes empty and lost and if there is *anything* Shinsou Hitoshi knows about his friend, Izuku has never broken before.

So Hitoshi finds that spark of anger building around the lodestone of his heart and lets it fester, stokes it until it is hot enough to diffuse into every niche of his body. “He... Loki said that he had interfered with a godly claim on Izuku—“

“Loki *claimed* me because he w-wanted to make a p-point.”

Izuku’s hands shake against his torso, fingers tangled in Hitoshi’s shirt and the pressure shifts against the neckline as he pulls at the fabric in time with his words. “He d-didn’t *want me...* ”

Hitoshi knows a little about being unwanted.

“It doesn’t matter—“

“It *does!* ”

Hitoshi pauses, thought cut off prematurely and he cannot help but stare. “It *doesn’t*. You’re still the same as you were before—“

Izuku hiccups wetly— he makes a noise like a chuckle but Hitoshi has never heard anyone pour heartbreak into laughter like this before. “You m-mean I’m still the exact same quirkless, *godless* D-deku that I a-always was.”

Something hot crawls up inside his skin at the *derision* in Izuku’s voice, feels it rupture inside his throat and it is bitter on the back of



his tongue. “No, that’s *not* what I meant.”

The feeling of Loki burning in his eyes makes him want to tear them out.

Hitoshi wants to stop speaking. He doesn’t like *speaking*— he has so much to lose through words, so much trust hanging on the end of every question. He wants to shut his mouth and never talk again, withdraw into the quiet of his mind and live only there.

But he has somewhere to speak now— Izuku does not shy away from his questions and Inko offers love like she doesn’t know *how* to give anything else.

So he keeps on speaking, though Inko is frozen in her seat— green eyes wide and glassy with unshed tears. He wishes she would speak— this is her son and she would know what to say.

But Inko is silent.

“I just—“ Hitoshi pauses, mind latching on to a thought. It flares, hot and fetid— a memory dark enough to dry his mouth. He has drunk all of his water— so he swallows around a sandpaper mouth and tastes misery. “Do you remember that day, when you found me on the rooftop?”

Izuku blinks up at him, clearly surprised at the change of topic. “Y-yes?”

“I was going to die that day.”

Izuku only blinks with wide eyes in response, mouth open.

Hitoshi still remembers scrubbing the blood out of his shirt that morning before school. Some of it is his— he doesn't think about that.

Instead he remembers a dying street cat, curling against him with wounds Hitoshi doesn't dare touch but it comes to *him* because—

Because Hitoshi had fed him and tended to his hurts. For weeks, he has fed this tabby— he has made it trust him.

And there is *nothing* Hitoshi can do to help it. He cannot hope to fix the devastation of its body, more open than it is whole.

It had crawled into his lap because Hitoshi had spent weeks caring for it, gave it food and warmth and *love* . A scrawny, hungry, pitiful thing that had crawled to him for more warmth and food because it trusted him, after weeks of feeding it on the way to school. His backpack rattles with empty food cans and the shifting slide of seeds, buried underneath his books.

And—

Hitoshi watches a cat heave shuddering breaths, pink foaming at the corners of his mouth— Hitoshi watches a cat die in his arms and he knows there never will be a way for him to be a hero.

Nothing, *no one* will ever trust him with the same open honesty that Hitoshi sees in slanted orange eyes. No civilian will ever trust a hero

with his quirk— there will always be fear.

And Hitoshi knows this is the end point.

He cannot help the children at the foster home. He cannot stop a cat bleeding out in his arms because Hitoshi will never be enough.

And Hitoshi scrubs the blood from his shirt with shaking, aching hands: and ignores his own flinch as the floorboards creak with footsteps outside the bathroom.

Hitoshi ignores the weight of the heavy, sharp metal in his pocket— it feels like a live wire pressed against his thigh.

And then a boy with hands scarred red, smiles at him from underneath green bangs and says something that Hitoshi will never forget and never *wants* to forget.

*“Well, if you wouldn't do something like that— w-why would I be afraid of you doing it?”*

And Hitoshi hasn't forgotten it.

The heavy razor ends up in the bin when he leaves school.

He's shifted from his thoughts as Izuku untangles himself from Hitoshi's side— his hand is still tight against his own. He wonders if Izuku even remembers he's holding it— but it shakes, as if his friend can't hold in the emotion bristling at his shoulders.

“Hitoshi...”

Izuku's voice is shaking with that tremor Hitoshi recognises— knows how his throat closes in itself when the shock of a situation is overtaking him.

“I was going to die that day when I went home, and you...” Hitoshi doesn't know how to make Izuku see, how to connect the dots and trace the outlines of all that Izuku has done for him just by *existing*. “You acted like I hadn't done anything *wrong*. ”

Hitoshi winces at the sudden pressure on his hand, Izuku's fingers digging in— his eyes are clearer than they have been all day and his voice is solid, with no room to argue when he bites back. “You *hadn't*. ”

“That! That exact thing right *there* ! You said I could be a hero and *nobody* has *ever* told me that! You just... you treated me like I mattered!”

Izuku blinks, eyes dark and the expression that twists his features reminds Hitoshi of that roaring, blistering anger at the altar. “That's the bare *minimum* Hitoshi, that s-shouldn't be something you—“

“The bare minimum is all I have *ever* had!”

Izuku is staring at him with dark green eyes, stone-hard fury glimmering in their light. “Y-yeah It is— it doesn’t mean it’s *right* . You’re supposed to have *more* !”

And Izuku believes it.

He doesn’t need to say it, doesn’t need to show it— Izuku’s eyes are steady and his voice is impassioned, fierce in a way that reminds Hitoshi of the boy who yelled at a god. Which, in retrospect, brings Hitoshi back to a thought that’s been lingering in the back of his mind: he’s honestly confused about how he managed to miss the sheer *audacity* Izuku is apparently capable of.

Hitoshi doesn’t know how these conversations always get turned back on him— he knows *how* to keep things away from him but somehow Izuku knows exactly how to switch the narrative on him. Hitoshi can’t even be angry at him.

“Izuku...”

Hitoshi turns to the Midoriya matriarch, glad to have an excuse to turn away from the green gaze vivisecting his trauma like his barriers are but thin rice paper. Inko sits with her hands clenched tightly in her lap still but she has stopped crying, although her cheeks are still wet.

“We... We talked about this, Izuku. You are *not* useless, no matter *what* Hisashi told you.”

Izuku pointedly turns away from her gaze, avoiding it entirely. “ *I-I* let us get hurt. He w-was right.”

Hitoshi watches a wave of something dark and *vicious* crash over Inko's face, an emotion he has no words for but looks like the unholy amalgamation of fury and despair and *failure* and the deepest, darkest depths of sorrow Hitoshi has ever seen. Then it is gone, like nothing has ever been there.

"If anyone is to blame, Midoriya Izuku, it would be me. I am your mother— no, don't glare at me like that!" She cuts Izuku off before he even makes a noise, mouth open in outrage. "I am your mother and if there is anyone to blame aside from *him* , it is *me!* So stop— it was never your fault. You are wanted— you are *everything* important in my life. You have a friend who wants you."

Inko's eyes are bright with tears, brimming at the corners and she makes no move to wipe them away.

"Beyond a god who should've been someone you could trust and a *man*— " Inko pauses, scrubs at the tears on her cheeks. "A *father* who was m-meant to be your protector... beyond all of that— you have been wanted from the very moment I knew you existed. Before I held you or felt you move— you were, *and still are* , the best thing that has *ever* happened to me."

Inko smiles then and Hitoshi is struck with a breathlessness, the lightning-strike realisation that he is seeing something immensely private. He feels like he should look away.

Izuku is gaping at his mother— like she's spilled something they've both known forever but had no words to say.

"And you—" Hitoshi gulps when Inko turns her bright green eyes to him. "You deserve more than the bare minimum. You are wanted— in between these walls, there is *always* room for you."

Hitoshi doesn't think he can be blamed for the noise that escapes the stranglehold of his throat, somewhere between a sob and a hiccup.

Izuku's hand is still warm against his and Hitoshi is grateful for the anchor to this moment— it ties him down into this reality. Every pulse of Izuku's heartbeat under his fingers just tells him that he isn't dreaming.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

The hallways of Tokage Junior high are hushed when Izuku follows Hitoshi through the school the next morning. His mother had suggested that he take a day off, try to rest from the stress of the previous day— but Izuku knows that no matter when he comes back, it will be the same.

There is a red petal stuck to the lapel of Hitoshi's black uniform and Izuku cannot drag his eyes away from it. He hadn't been able to go to his locker, too afraid of the red flowers he knew he would find. He is a coward and even Hitoshi knew it, unable to approach the lockers until Hitoshi made sure any stray spider lilies were hidden or gone.

There is a hush that follows him— until there isn't.

Takeda Haru, as Izuku now knows his first name to be, stands in front of Izuku's desk like a judge before a courtroom. The entire classroom watches him as he walks there, eyes pinned to the unfolding conflict. And there *will* be a conflict, because only a fool wouldn't recognise Takeda's habit of poking at weaknesses.

And Izuku has nothing *but* weaknesses now.

Before, he at least had anonymity but with his father's crimes public knowledge, there is nowhere to hide.

"So, I guess the warning I gave you at the beginning of school was wrong, huh?" There's an oily slickness to the brunet's words, smug satisfaction coating each one. "I warned you about a villain and—"

There's a sharp bite to his smile, wide and vicious. "Well, I guess it was a mistake to warn a villain about another villain. Because that's what you are, aren't you? Daddy dearest didn't even love you—"

Hitoshi's chair scrapes the floor behind him and Izuku knows he should be numb. His track record, his instincts: both beg him to dissociate, to drift away from the hurt being dragged across the live wire of his trauma.

But Izuku is present, aware and *angry*.

So when Hitoshi looms over them from behind, still a head or so taller than almost all of their classmates, Izuku just smiles. From the flinch on Takeda's face, it isn't a pleasant expression.

"Takeda, how dare you?"

Takeda tactically ignores Hitoshi, staring down at Izuku and the grin hasn't faded at all. "And daddy *really* didn't love you, did he? I've read the articles and man he did a number on you! You and your poor mother, I wonder what she did *wron-*"



Izuku doesn't know what possesses him in that moment— there is no burn of godly influence in his chest and he feels his heart still for a long moment.

But Takeda falls silent: an audible thwack of knuckles hitting flesh echoes throughout the classroom as Izuku launches a fist into the boy's face.

His knuckles burn from the contact, his bones ache from the impact and he definitely has no no idea how to really throw a punch. But Izuku finds that the burn of his knuckles is comforting, familiar— feeling the pain gives his mind a clarity he hasn't felt in months.

“Don't you *ever* talk about my mother.”

The classroom is silent— even the teacher, who usually ignores anything and everything that doesn't require her immediate attention, stares at him like they've never seen him before.

Takeda doesn't speak again, doesn't even make a noise as he retreats to his seat with wide eyes. The room stutters back into noise, as the teacher finally regains her senses and waves everyone to their seats, face red.

“Midoriya! Shinsou! Takeda! Principal's office, now!”

Izuku feels the buzzing settle into soft static in his brain and as he gathers his bag, the panic finally hits him like a steam train. He punched a classmate. He punched his *bully* , who he has managed to ignore and pacify for months. A bully who would undoubtedly take

this as a personal affront.

They leave the classroom silently, though Takeda steps as far away from Izuku as he can manage and Hitoshi immediately reaches down to hold Izuku's hand. It feels odd to not be holding Hitoshi's hand after doing so for hours the night before, the contact soft and comforting.

It reminds Izuku that he's dragged Hitoshi into a conflict where they have no allies— Hitoshi has avoided conflicts and the principal's office like the plague. Izuku knows why— it's the same reason that he himself had never reported bullies, never reported Ka— Bakugou.

Nobody would ever believe them.

And now Izuku has dragged both into a situation where they will lose, because he couldn't stop that overflowing anger.

And they *will* lose.

The trek down to the bottom floor is silent and tense, only the sound of their footsteps echoing in the stairwell. Izuku feels like every scrape or his shoes on the metal-edges steps is as loud as a cannon in his ears.

The door is already open when they get there, the receptionist waving them in without looking up from her laptop. They file in through the narrow doorway, one by one and take their seats. Hitoshi decidedly takes the one between Izuku and Takeda: Izuku can't decide if it's because his friend is worried for *him* or about what he might do to *Takeda*.

The thought fills him with a looming dread that overshadows almost everything else churning inside his mind. He's never had anyone afraid of him.

The idea that someone is afraid of him makes his knuckles ache and his stomach swoops low, turning and twisting. There is pleasure deep in the back of his thoughts and he strains to forget it.

(It felt like the **right** thing to do and Izuku doesn't want to debate the ethics of violence against perpetrators inside his own brain right now)

Their principal is a man Izuku has only glimpsed briefly around the school— a short, portly man with a receding hairline that is combed back as if in a desperate attempt to cover the bald patch at the crown of his head. He's a pallid colour, all pale and sweaty no matter the weather— Hitoshi's hand finally lets go of his and Izuku feels his own overwhelming anxiety building up in his chest.

But— it stays there, pooling beneath his ribs and instead Izuku has a startlingly sudden clarity of the world around him. *'So this is how the rest of the world sees ,'* he finds himself thinking.

"Come in boys, come in. Yes, yes— sit down!" Hachida Toshito is the name on the placard on the man's desk— he gestures with one hand, as if flustered to realise they've already sat. "Now, Himura-sensei said you three have been fighting?"

Takeda, as if he had been waiting for this exact moment, lets his lower lip fall and *wobble*: coupled with the bruise slowly forming on his cheek, it's a *dangerously* believable ruse.

And Izuku remembers with a flash of burning, searing horror that Takeda is the nephew of the man sitting in front of them.

It seems like the same realisation has happened across Hitoshi— Izuku can see the muscle jump in his jaw as he grits his teeth.

“T-they turned on me, Uncle! I was trying to express my condolences —“

Hitoshi rears back like he’s been slapped, eyes bright with anger.  
“That’s a *lie* —“

“Shinsou Hitoshi, you will be silent!” There’s a crack of the principal’s thunderous voice in the office— and Izuku is startled to see Hitoshi immediately go blank, hands tightly gripped to the sides of his chair.  
“I will not have you using *that* quirk to get out of trouble!”

Izuku gaped, his mouth moving faster than his brain. “S-sir, you can’t just not let someone d-defend themselves! He didn’t do anything *wrong!* ”

Those beady black eyes refocus on Izuku and he feels, more than sees, the *disdain*. “You are hardly in a better position, Midoriya. Your presence at this school is already limited— we are not a school that regularly accepts quirkless individuals and we have thus far been *kind enough* to ignore your transgression—“

“M-my what?”

The principal clicks his tongue in irritation at being interrupted. “Your *transgressions*, Midoriya. You are clearly plagiarising your work— it is a step above all your marks from Aldera and we have been generous in ignoring up until this point. Not to mention— this fiasco with your father and our allowances for your... *uniform choices*. ” Hachida’s face

screws up at the phrasing and Izuku feels himself go cold.

Izuku's mind is white— wiped clean of all thoughts, fury tinging his every breath with something dark. Why does it always come back to quirkless, to some *stranger* caring about what was beneath his *shirt*—

“Sir—“

“I won't hear excuses, Midoriya. Your mother has already been called — Shinsou, your foster father will be here soon.” There's a flinch that Hitoshi doesn't even try to hide, a full body one that makes Izuku want to reach out to his friend. But—

Izuku thinks that will only make it worse: so he doesn't.

Izuku remembers asking Hitoshi on the rooftop, weeks ago— whether his foster family *hurt* him. And even if Izuku hadn't known it then: he knows it for certain now.

“Shinsou, Midoriya—“ Hachida pauses, evaluating his words as if they tasted bitter to him. “Since these are technically your first *official*,” the man spits the word with only a hairsbreadth less vitriol than his nephew spewed back in the classroom. “-disciplinary issues, I can only place you both in detention. This will not be counted on your records — it would be if I could.”

Izuku wants to scream, he wants to rage— who is this man, to do this, to abuse his authority to reinforce everything the world says about them. Even Takeda looks... perturbed, like this working a little *too* well and he's off balance.

It secures in Izuku's mind that the boy isn't beyond change, that he's been raised and taught by men like Hachida how the world worked.

And, Izuku thinks absently with the part of his brain that isn't entangled in his anger, who had taught Bakugou how to see the world.

"That will be all."

Izuku blinks, mouth falling open. "S-sir, if you would just let us explain—"

"I don't want your excuses, Midoriya." The man turns to his nephew, a softer expression falling in place. "Haru, head back to class please. Tell Himura-sensei that Midoriya and Shinsou will not be rejoining the class today. You two, go collect your bags and head to the main entrance. I will meet with your guardians to explain the situation there."

There's nothing else left to say, so Izuku nods in a daze and barely even notices himself starting to walk to the lockers until Hitoshi's hand finds his. When Izuku glances up, he's shocked to see the *wetness* in Hitoshi's eyes. His friend is pale and Izuku realises that it's *fear*, not anger, tensing his jaw.

"Hitoshi?"

The taller boy just shakes his head, mouth clamped shut and squeezes Izuku's hand. He catches Izuku's gaze and points to his throat with his free hand as they walk. He makes a repetitive motion, sawing back and forth—

It takes a long moment but Izuku finally catches on.

*Mute.*

Izuku wonders, with a growing anger, how many times Hitoshi has been denied a chance to speak that being told to stop speaking renders him *unable* .

“I—okay, Hitoshi. It’s okay.”

And there’s nothing else left to say.

They gather their locker items in silence, hands detached for the brief time it takes them to pack their bags and then entangled back together once again. It should bother them— casual touch isn’t something that’s done but... it feels good, to know that someone is there. His hands don’t lie to him, unlike his eyes and his mind and his heart.

By the time they’ve both collected their shoes from their shoe lockers, their respective guardians have already arrived at the front gate. Izuku’s mother is clearly arguing with the principal, who seems to be attempting to preserve his dignity without upsetting the woman any further.

There’s a tall man, waiting near the gate and Izuku can feel the exact moment Hitoshi spots him, because the lanky teen freezes in place and his grip on Izuku’s hand reaches new levels. The principal has turned to what is undoubtedly Hitoshi’s foster father.

“—Masamura-san, please discipline your son! His attendance at this

school is contingent on him not causing issues, so please ensure this does not happen again.”

“I’ll do my best, Hachida-san. Come, Shinsou.”

Izuku watches sickly pale yellow eyes glance over him and settle with viper-like intensity on Hitoshi. The shudder Izuku feels through Hitoshi’s body is violent, an instinctive reaction. It makes Izuku’s anger flare, red hot in his veins.

Hitoshi lets go of his hand and Izuku has to wrestle down the instinct to grab it again— to hold it, to drag Hitoshi away and never let him go back again.

Instead Izuku watches his friend walk away with dragging feet and he struggles not to think of the way Hitoshi flinches when Masamura wraps a hand around his elbow and begins to walk.

..◆□□□□□ □ □□□□□◆..

It’s late, easily past midnight when Izuku finds himself dragged from sleep— there’s a noise at the front door, audible even over the storm that began just after dinner. The wind has died down, no longer the howling gale but instead a hissing, sighing breeze that whistles in the crevices of his window.

There’s a noise at the door, something that sounds like knocking. Izuku wonders if it’s Hayabusa from the next unit over— he’s



something of an alcoholic, and often knocks at their door in the morning hours. Izuku feels... empathy, he thinks, for the man. He's a widower and his children are gone, far away. Hayabusa is lonely, so Izuku tries to do the right thing for him when he can.

The elderly were *lonely*, Izuku found, more than anything. Even the angriest, surliest among them were just intensely, painfully lonely. So if a kind reminder to an elderly neighbour is the right thing to do, if all Izuku can do is walk a grieving man back to his home—

It's a small sacrifice for doing what is *right*.

He meets his mother in the hallway, as she pulls a dressing gown around her and he waves her back to bed. "I've got it, it's probably Hayabusa-san."

His mother just nods without questioning it, yawning widely and tottering back to bed on bare feet. Izuku pulls the hoodie against his sides as he comes down the stairs.

"I'm coming, Hayabusa-san!"

He pulls open the door when he gets there and blinks in surprise, then in dawning horror. It's not Hayabusa—

The familiar face of his best friend peers out from beneath a rain-soaked hoodie, a dark bruise building across one cheek and there's a smear of blood across the other, stretching down past his lips. There's something stretched across his face, hanging from one side like he's been struggling to remove it.

“H-Hitoshi?”

He’s shivering violently in the wind and Izuku is almost worried he will blow away. He drags the boy inside, ignoring the way Hitoshi’s flinch makes his stomach turn. In the light of the entryway, Izuku can see the extent of what they’re dealing with.

There’s a broad stripe of skin rubbed raw across Hitoshi’s face, underneath a tight band of leather—

There’s a *muzzle*.

## Chapter End Notes

So we are in the heavy angst story building section of this fic—we’re building up to the first plot arc climax, and it’s gonna be a little bumpy!

Things are looking grim, they are gonna get worse and then they’ll get better!

# emergence and emergencies arc part 1

## Chapter Notes

SURPRISE

Enjoy (:

Come yell at me!

Lovingly dedicated to that shitty commenter: heck off <3

This chapter contains implications of child abuse and descriptions of injuries. Please take care

[Discord](#)

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

## Chp 11

PREVIOUSLY

*“H-Hitoshi?”*

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*There's a broad stripe of skin rubbed raw across Hitoshi's face, underneath a tight band of leather—*

*There's a **muzzle** .*

..◆□□□□□□ ◡ □□□□□□◆..

“If you cannot remain silent, we *will* take away your ability to choose.”

Those are the first words Masamura Hideo says to him, when the social worker drops Hitoshi off at the home. It's a large, red-brick house— two-story and he can see at least three other children peeking through the curtains.

His stomach drops to his feet.

A group home.

Hitoshi has never had luck with any homes— but group homes were, by far, the worst.

Too little supervision, too many mouths to feed and their payments only stretched so far. The system didn't care about how much it

*actually* cost to feed a child— let alone a household with multiple children. They didn't change the rate for teenagers— the stipend for Hitoshi hasn't changed in the seven years he's been in care.

It doesn't matter how much money came with him anyway— people didn't take him in to care for him. They took him because they knew nobody cared enough to really care about his progress, that a case worker will never follow up with issues concerning Shinsou Hitoshi. He is an uncomplicated case—

Hitoshi has been a free meal ticket for half of his life and he knows it will not change any time soon.

Ten year old Hitoshi picks at the stitches that are his parting gift from the latest in a string of homes: a home that didn't care about reputations and only wanted to see what Hitoshi could *do* for them—

It's been his shortest stay in any home on his record but Hitoshi will never, *ever* forget what that *home* taught him.

Trusting adults only gets you hurt— it's the lesson trash ingrained on every bone in his body.

The man in front of him will be no exception.

Mother used to say that people were like trees— some were willows, stretching out across waterways for cool shade and soft leaves. *“Toshi, people grow roots deep into the ground and they grow up, up, up into the sky! We have to learn which people are trees we can climb and which ones to not.”*

Hitoshi doesn't want to think of his mother dying in her bed, and the letter tucked in his bag that no one can know exists. Somewhere on a faded page with words grown pale with time, is the phrase *'sometimes trees get sick and the best thing a seed can do is find another place to grow. Go far, little dandelion'*.

Hitoshi doesn't want to think of trees— but he does.

Masamura is like an oak—impossibly tall to the ten year old and solid where he stands on the earth. Like an oak, Hitoshi pictures that Masamura kills everything that tries to grow around him, poisonous roots deep in soil he is meant to share. Unlike an oak, he wants to run far away from the shadow he casts. He wants to tell his social worker that he will be good, he *will* , just let him stay in one place for a little while, *please* !

But Hitoshi isn't allowed to speak, he cannot beg for a solid foundation and he cannot ask to leave. If he opens his mouth, they will round on him like wolves and Hitoshi isn't willing to see whether they will bark or bite.

But his social worker leaves him on the doorstep with a man he barely knows. He knows she's supposed to come in— she's supposed to check paperwork and assess the conditions inside the home. But Kabasawa is a busy woman— she's got a failing marriage she can't fix, if the loud phone call in the car was anything to go by.

So she leaves him on the doorstep and Hitoshi walks into a world where he has no allies.

The other children are told to avoid him and they do, at first. Hitoshi eats at different times, when he does eat. Always in his room, always alone— Masamura's wife wears gloves when she brings his plate to him, movements constrained like she's afraid to touch him.

He feels like a germ in their house, watching the woman clear away his dishes like she intends to burn them. In the eyes of Masamura Keiko, Hitoshi is not a child— he's a parasite in their home.

Because this isn't *his home* .

Hitoshi soon learns which rooms are safe to enter and which are not, when he can use the kitchen for water and when doing so will send someone into a rage. Above all, Hitoshi learns to keep his doors locked.

He's the eldest child in the home— there are four others, each pair sharing rooms while Hitoshi is in the end room: he's fairly sure it's actually a converted walk-in closet. He's hardly game enough to mention it— he has nothing to lose, he is nothing, they have nothing of his and he will not give them anything.

He learns the names of the children, far slower than Hitoshi thinks he's meant to.

But it turns out interfering in 'discipline' is the way to secure loyalty from a bunch of eight year olds, which Hitoshi has an inkling is **not** the healthiest attachment base ever.

They filter in, quietly, the day after Hitoshi had stepped between a belt and a child who has no way to fight back. Kotone is only eight

and she has no quirk, nothing in her bones to defend her— Hitoshi has years of experience in weathering storms in the guise of humans. He may not be an oak— but Hitoshi can take hits that will grind these children down into the dust.

Hitoshi cannot stand to think of him stunting the growth of a child he has seen scooping spiders up barehanded and tipping carefully outside, unable to bear hurting them.

He wants to ask if they're okay, if they are hurt or hungry.

But he didn't remain silent, and they have taken away his ability to choose, to speak and the *muzzle*—

..✧□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□ ✧..

Izuku stares in horror at the scene before him, the blood looks almost cartoonish where the harsh flat lighting of their front door hits it. Izuku's hands shake with familiar anxiety as he pulls his friend in from the storm.

He doesn't know where to put his hands— Hitoshi's jacket obscures his body and he can't tell where there might be additional injuries. His hands flutter aimlessly, disjointedly, from one place to the other. He hovers over the mass of leather gagging Hitoshi's mouth , unwilling to touch until he knows he's not going to make it worse: Izuku eyes the way he stands with a gaze used to searching for pain, accustomed to assessing injuries in seconds.

Izuku feels his heart seize in his chest.



“Mum!”

Izuku surprises himself with the volume of his cry, echoing throughout a unit which has never heard raised voices before. Even his mother, in her height of her anger this week, had never risen above a slightly louder than normal volume. It must be just as shocking for his mother, because he hears her footsteps on the stairs moments later.

She rounds the corner to the entryway and Izuku can see the exact moment she takes in the scene— Hitoshi dripping wet, face half obscured in wet leather and smeared with red. He can also see the exact moment instinct takes over: she takes one step towards Hitoshi, hands by her side and facing forward to reassure the taller boy that her hands are empty.

Hitoshi flinches regardless of the gesture.

Inko pauses misstep— she reassesses the tension coiled tightly in Hitoshi’s shoulders and seemingly changes tactics in an instant.

“Izuku.” He glances towards her, already knowing what’s going on. “Let’s get Shinsou-kin to the bathroom. I’ll fetch the med kit and meet you up there in a tick.”

She lays a soft, warm hand on Izuku’s shoulder, and he leans into the contact with a sigh, feeling his own rising anxiety waning away like the tide. The message she means is clear— they don't have time to think of long nights spent patching each other up right now. Hitoshi needs their help and Izuku needs to be there for him.

He squares his shoulders under her hand and she nods, kindness warming her smile and there's a familiar anger in her eyes that echoes the one in his chest.

First they'll help Hitoshi and then— they will find out who had laid hands on him.

Releasing his shoulder, she flicks her eyes to Hitoshi and then disappears into the kitchen with no other words.

Turning back to Hitoshi, Izuku is somewhat alarmed to realise his friend hasn't moved at all. He's still dripping water on the doormat, shivering under the hood and he is swaying on the spot— all the more telling, he makes no move to speak. It is like Izuku is staring at a fragment of the boy he has come to know.

He reaches for Hitoshi's hand, slowly— keeping both hands fully in view as he moves and sighs in relief when his friend doesn't withdraw.

"I-it's okay Hitoshi. We're going to the bathroom and I'm going to get that..." Izuku sucks a whistling breath through his front teeth for a moment."That *thing* off of your f-face and you can talk when you're ready."

There's a spark, something buried in Hitoshi's face when he mentions speaking and Izuku carefully files that bit of information away for later. It settles somewhere under the magma hot anger filling his torso.

"I-is that okay, Hitoshi?"

The purple haired teen stares down at him for a long moment that stretches on just a little too long for comfort but eventually, he nods. Half a breath later and his fingers close over Izuku's, and Izuku watches the tension ease from Hitoshi's shoulders.

He lets it go as Hitoshi slowly shrugs off the lightweight hoodie and shucks his shoes off with none of his usual grace. He stumbles when he straightens up, but Izuku braces him on instinct.

Seeing Hitoshi wince at the contact tells him that his suspicion of Hitoshi's jacket hiding additional injuries is probably correct.

Taking his hand once again, Izuku shivers at the cold dampness of his skin and sets off towards the stairs. Hitoshi follows, seemingly in a daze as they ascend the stairs and Izuku flicks on the bathroom light with a soft 'ta da' under his breath.

Hitoshi's face twitches and Izuku could've sworn it was the beginning of a smile.

Hitoshi ends up sitting on the closed toilet seat, settling back against the cold ceramic of the cistern with a sigh. His eyes are sliding shut and Izuku thinks he can't be blamed for panicking, hand squeezing Hitoshi's fingers tightly to draw his awareness back. "Hitoshi, you need to stay awake. I— we don't know if you've got a concussion or not!"

"M'not."

Izuku blinks, staring at the pale purple eyes barely visible through slitted eyes and the muffled mumble behind the leather. "I know you're probably not but we gotta make s-sure! Concussions—" Izuku cuts off, busying himself with washing his hands to hide the tremble

in his hands. He remembers too many nights wondering if his mother would wake up. “Concussions can be dangerous.”

Hitoshi is staring back at him with open eyes when he turns back, like he’s seeing a reflection of himself instead of Izuku. He seems far more cognisant with every passing moment, like the shock of the situation is finally fading away and Izuku is relieved to see that familiar glint return to his eyes.

His mother arrives at that moment, as Izuku settles on the edge of the bathtub to face Hitoshi, peering through the open doorway with a grim face. “I have the med kit— Shinsou-kun, are you comfortable with me helping?”

Izuku glances to where Hitoshi’s hands are gripping his jeans, knuckles white with the pressure. He shakes his head, an half aborted movement like he’s regretting it already.

“I won’t come in then. I’m going to go downstairs and fix something light for you to eat. Regardless of whether you have a concussion, something like miso will help.” Izuku glances at his mother as she leaves the first aid kit at the door with a soft noise. Her eyes are considerably less soft as she meets Izuku’s and then turns away to the stairwell.

Izuku leans over to grab the medical kit, quickly pulling out a veritable wealth of first aid items. It’s a quick thing, born of long practice and necessity. Hitoshi seems to be eyeing the excessive amount of burn ointment in the box and Izuku shuts the lid with a nervous clatter, not quite willing to talk about that right now.

It’s a striking loud in the cramped bathroom, tiles bouncing the sound into an echo. Hitoshi doesn’t flinch— but it’s a near thing.

“S-sorry, Hitoshi... I need to touch your face to take that... to take it off.”

Hitoshi nods, eyes wide and staring somewhere far above Izuku's shoulder. Izuku tries to ignore how that empty gaze makes his stomach feel hollow.

Izuku stands to the side as slowly as he can, gently pulling at the straps holding the muzzle in place. It's designed in such a way that it's impossible to remove by the wearer— the complicated locking function at the base of Hitoshi's neck is hard enough from his vantage point.

But after a long minute, Izuku slides a clasp out of place and the leather falls limply around Hitoshi's neck and gravity drags it down. Neither Izuku nor Hitoshi make any move to fetch it when it hits the floor with a soft noise.

Hitoshi gasps out a deep breath in the second afterwards and then immediately falls silent.

Izuku returns to his position on the edge of the bathtub, taking in the extent of Hitoshi's face for the first time. There's a dark purpling mark growing across one cheekbone— a red abrasion sits in the centre of the forming bruise. The muzzle—

And Izuku's stomach is tight with rage, because that's a goddamned *muzzle* on his bathroom floor and it clearly wasn't regulation standard or Hitoshi would've been able to remove it himself. The thoughts are swirling, bitter and howling and confused because Izuku is *tired* of watching people hurt: more importantly, he's tired of just *letting* it happen .

There's something that needs to be done about that, but Izuku's brain is far from logical right now, caught up in the red indentations that the *muzzle* has left against Hitoshi's cheeks and jaw. They won't bruise but Izuku finds himself tracing the marks with soft fingertips, memorising them and shaping his anger until it is a red hot knife between his ribs.

He wants to remember this anger.

Hitoshi's eyes are dark when Izuku's fingertips trail the marks and there's something in that gaze, something in the space between their faces that Izuku doesn't want to forget either.

His cheeks burn and he tucks his hands away like they are red hot.

He *will* remember this anger.

There's a darker mark peeking from underneath Hitoshi's collar and Izuku nervously wrings his hands together in his lap. "I-I... you'll need to take your shirt off..."

Hitoshi's face twists and Izuku almost regrets asking but it clears away and he's moving to pull the soaking wet shirt away from his torso.

There's a dark red, navy-tinged bruise stretching across one side of Hitoshi's ribs—it's swollen and warm to the touch when Izuku lays a hand to probe the edges. With an apologetic grimace up at his friend, Izuku rolls his shoulders. "I need to c-check your ribs aren't broken and it's going to hurt. If.. if it gets too much, you need to tell me okay? If a-anywhere I touch hurts more than anywhere else, you *need* to tell me."

Hitoshi nods, face already tight in pain and Izuku knows how much bruised ribs hurt even when you stayed still.

With a deep breath, he begins to probe at the darkening bruise, ear trained carefully to Hitoshi's breathing and the occasional deep noise of pain he lets out. There's some swelling but by the time he's finished palpitating the bruise, he's at least ninety percent sure Hitoshi has no broken ribs.

The purple haired teen chuckles in response when he says as much, then instantly clutches at his side with a pained noise.

"Okay," he wheezes when he catches his breath. "No laughing, got it."

Despite the situation and the time and the fact that he's rubbing balm into the edges of his best friend's bruises that he's fairly sure are from his guardian— Izuku can't help but snort, devolving into pointless laughter. Hitoshi rewards him with a sideways grin, eyes tired. There's a glimpse of that familiar light in Hitoshi's eyes and he shivers in the cold bathroom, the moment lost.

"Ah, s-sorry! I'll finish with your face and we'll get you something to wear that isn't..."

"Soaking wet? Blood stained?" Hitoshi supplies helpfully.

Izuku blushes, flapping a hand as he begins to wipe the last of the drying blood from Hitoshi's face. "Yes, both of those things!"

It should feel wrong to be this light hearted, considering the circumstances. But it feels right, to sit in that cramped little bathroom and laugh at the face Hitoshi makes at the cold wet towel against his skin as Izuku wipes at the blood.

Hitoshi doesn't speak more than he needs to after that, and Izuku is more than happy to talk for both of them.

Izuku's mother, at some point, had placed a stack of unfamiliar clothes at the top of the stairs. At least— Izuku wants to say they are unfamiliar but Izuku knows that his clothes don't fit Hitoshi. His mother's clothes wouldn't fit Hitoshi—

The sight of Midoriya Hisashi's clothes on Hitoshi's frame feels—

Izuku shoves that dark feeling down, down underneath his anger and his fury and lets that yawning, empty sadness sink away to where he can pretend he doesn't feel it.

By the time they make their way down to the kitchen, Izuku's mother is sitting with three cups of tea and a small bowl of what definitely smells like miso. Izuku isn't hungry— but he hears Hitoshi's stomach rumbling next to him, turning his face away to hide his grin.

Hitoshi sees anyway and just rolls his eyes.

Once they've settled around the table, they sip their tea and Hitoshi polishes off the miso in record time. It occurs to Izuku, somewhat out of the blue, that it's probably a given that the other hasn't eaten since lunch the day before.



Izuku's somewhat glad that this is happening somewhere that isn't their lounge room. He's tired of sitting on that couch and tearing down a new reality every few weeks.

It's only once Hitoshi's finished his soup, and their cups are empty of tea, that the silence grows brittle.

"I don't want to tell you."

Izuku wants to say he's surprised, but he really isn't.

"Hitoshi, you're my best friend and I m-mean this as kindly as possible." Izuku takes a deep breath, steeling himself. Hitoshi eyes him with wary curiosity. "But you are an absolute *idiot*."

"Izuku—" his mother starts, a warning building in her tone.

"You told m-me, just a few days ago... that if anyone ever laid a hand on me, you wanted me to tell you." He pauses, unable to keep his breathing even for that long moment. "Isn't it a bit hypocritical of you to ask me to do that?"

Hitoshi looks like he's been hit in the face with a sledgehammer and honestly, Izuku's glad for it. He's been wanting to take a hammer to the glass walls of Hitoshi's self constructed sense of zero self worth for a good few months now and he's not going to waste it.

"If... if you need it, if you need *help*—" Izuku glances at his mother, who reaches across to press a warm hand to the back of his hand. "We are *here*. We're just waiting for y-you."

Hitoshi blinks at them.

Izuku groans and tucks his face into hands. “Look. Hitoshi.” He grasps at straws for one long moment, working out his words. “You’re here b- because you trust us, right?”

Hitoshi nods slowly, like he’s confused as to where Izuku’s going with this. Izuku blows out one long, lung-draining breath as he reaches out to take Hitoshi’s hand in his.

“Then *trust us*. ”

With how close they are, Izuku can see the moisture that gathers in the corners of his friend’s eyes as it comes. It doesn’t fall, Hitoshi rubbing it away just as soon as it forms.

“I spoke when I wasn’t supposed to.”

Izuku waits for the rest of the explanation, breath static in his lungs.

And *waits* .

Until he realises Hitoshi is waiting for his reply and that was the entire explanation.

That's the entire explanation for the muzzle marks still red against

Hitoshi's jaw and the expanse of bruised flesh across his torso.

Anger rips through Izuku like a hot knife through butter and he sees the world in shades of red.

"What?" He finally manages to croak out.

Across the table, Izuku's mother seems to be faring similarly.

Hitoshi blinks at them, shoulders loose with relief. "That's why, for the muzzle. I talked back about the school fight."

Izuku grits his teeth, gesturing with his free hand to Hitoshi's chest. "And t-that?"

"That was for the school thing. I drew attention to them— Masamura-san doesn't appreciate marks on my record, it brings the social workers snooping too closely. It's rarely this bad."

His mother speaks up then, voice slow and measured. "But there are other times."

Hitoshi nods, a slow movement. "Yes."

Izuku's mother pauses over her fresh cup of tea, green eyes dark. "Would you like to get out of there, Shinsou-kun?"

Hitoshi looks sideways at Inko, full attention on her. His hand is tight

on Izuku's.

"I don't think there is a way, Inko-san."

There's a wide smile stretching across Izuku's mother's face, vicious and sharp at the edges. "Did I ever tell you what I do for a living, Shinsou-kun?"

Hitoshi shakes his head, eyes wary as Inko slides a white business card across the table so he can see it. Izuku feels his own face twisting in the same sharp expression his mother sports.

**Midoriya Inko**

**Attorney at law, child neglect specialist**

Hitoshi glances up, eyes wide and cheeks growing pink. "Inko-san?"

"I'm a family law attorney, Shinsou-kun. And you—" she smiles, soft and warm. "You're my new pro Bono client."

Hitoshi gapes, eyes darting from the card to Izuku's mother at dizzying speeds. "S-so I could..."

Inko's smile widens, tapping the card twice. "We're going to get you out— no matter what."

Izuku gets a warm joy out of causing Hitoshi to question his life: it turns out, it's just as satisfying to watch his mother do it too.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Forty minutes later, Izuku finds himself in a curious predicament he hadn't really ever anticipated. He's never really been close enough to anyone for... whatever this is.

They'd agreed that it was perfectly reasonable for them to share a bed for the night— Izuku had a double, so there was plenty of room and Hitoshi needed to keep as warm as possible after his chilling walk in the rain. So somehow— they had ended up here.

Shinsou Hitoshi is not only a bed *and* blanket hog, but he lacks any and all boundaries when he is asleep. His head is braced on Izuku's shoulder, one arm slung around his waist and oh god, *Hitoshi is a cuddler*.

Izuku feels odd to say that he's not entirely *uncomfortable*— there's something inherently soothing about the pressure across him, the constant, warm contact. It settles the restless churning of his stomach and his thoughts go quiet.

As he drifts off, Izuku wonders if it would be excessively awkward to ask Hitoshi to do this when they are awake.

Reality crashes in like a steam train the next morning, when Izuku wakes— cold. Hitoshi is no longer draped across his chest, like he had most of the night despite Izuku's attempts to wriggle away.

Instead, Hitoshi is sitting next to him— fingers tracing the purple mark across his cheek in the view of the mirrored wardrobe door. Izuku drags himself up from his sleep-warm spot on the bed, to stare into the mirror with his friend.

“You once told me that...”

Hitoshi's shoulders shake in the pause, a rushed intake of air. “You once told me that it wasn't right, that they... that they hurt me, no matter why, when I was protecting the other kids.”

Hitoshi's eyes are gold in the encroaching morning sun, light filtering through the blinds. The colour swallows his entire iris.

“Is it still wrong, that they hurt me when I was trying to protect *me* ? Is it wrong that I wanted to save *me* this time?”

Izuku sighs and reaches for the hand that is still tracing the bruise.

“It was always wrong, Hitoshi. No matter what you did, it was s-still wrong.

Hitoshi doesn't answer, except for a tighter grip where their hands are connected. Izuku wants to think the silence is thoughtful—

But that's just wishful thinking.

# emergence and emergencies arc part 2

## Chapter Summary

:D :D :D

## Chapter Notes

Come yell at me!

[Discord](#)

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

By the gods, Izuku is *sick* of seeing this man on their couch. Present Mic is out of uniform, hair long and braided over one shoulder, clothing choices considerably less... *leathery*.

And he's not alone.

There's a familiar shape to the other man's face, like Izuku has seen him before. And, with a start— he realises he *has*.

Izuku understands a lot of things about the world. He understands that he lives, as a quirkless individual in a world where that means he is *lesser*, in a position of relative privilege. Compared to the mostly less-than-stellar treatment of quirkless individuals across their world, he lives as safe and comfortable a life as is possible.

Izuku knows that around the world, times are changing— the shrinking population of quirkless people and the growing rise of quirk supremacy drives them into desperate times. Australia is a wasteland, the United States is devolving into religious witch hunts against the quirkless, region by region— it's a slow decline into a world where Izuku is seen as less than human. Europe is facing reforms that border

on cruel— quirklessness is considered a disease, one that they are more than eager to stamp out.

Izuku understands that his position is somewhat unique because— no matter *why* he has it, or how furious it makes him to think of it— he's owed a boon from a god. And that's a tantalisingly dangerous gift, humming in the back of his mind. It grows frenetic in the early hours of the morning when he stares up at the ceiling, eyes gritty with lack of sleep.

He understands how people, as a whole, work— what drives them onward in life. He understands that against the masses, the will and self control of one individual is nothing. Izuku understands that each step he takes in this world is numbered, that each exhale crosses off a cosmic tally mark somewhere.

He understands that the gods are paramount in their world— not by their own power, but by the power their devotees give them over their lives and their governments and their societies as a whole. That the gods were just symbols of the things humanity took for granted, that people held in high esteem.

And above all, Midoriya Izuku understands that information is *power* . It's a lesson he's learned well— as a six year old in a dark computer room, watching a video he knows he's not meant to but the allure of a smile that promises him safety is too irresistible, that tells him that *I am here*. He's learned it in googling how to splint fingers, in the wealth of burn care information has stored away— it is second hand nature to douse the burning in his skin when he brushes it on a hot pan.

Izuku understands that information is his greatest ally in a world determined to deny him every avenue of success.



And like any good scholar, Izuku had not let his father's arrest fall from his mind with nary a thought as to the *how* and the *why* . No, not at all— like a child raised to take in any information and use it to survive, Izuku had set about learning every single facet of the events that led to his freedom from his father.

Firstly— the *why* .

Up until two hours after his arrest, the task force assigned to the apprehension and arrest of the villain 'Salamander' appeared to have had no knowledge of his true identity. They had a wealth of information on his patterns of attack, his places of interest, his area of influence, and an inkling of his connections. And for a taskforce, that was enough. The fact that Salamander was a man behind the mask; a father, a husband, a *predator* — those things meant nothing to them.

From what he could gather, Izuku thought that his father's arrest was entirely accidental. By sheer coincidence, Salamander had made a mistake in their patrol timing. By good fortune, there had been a hero or two nearby—

Entirely unplanned and separate from the taskforce, strangers had torn down the crepe paper walls of his reality and exposed the bare bones of his life. Izuku and his mother had existed on the barest of margins, written in corners— they did not make waves, they did not build a home around the hearth in their house.

Until everything had been stripped away and they realised how close to shackles the walls of their home had become.

And then, the *how* .

Izuku spends long nights poring over hero forums, gathering every

single piece of footage he can of the fight between Present Mic and Salamander. He hunts down the snippets of Youtubers discussing the fight— in the week between his father’s arrest and his start at Tokage Junior High, Izuku hunches over his phone, one hands perched as if to articulate his thoughts in writing,

But Izuku had given up on notebooks by the time his father had sent the fourth one up in smoke.

So inside the walls of his mind, he scrawls and scrawls the information until there is nothing he *doesn’t* know.

Except— it takes a solid month before Izuku finds even a hint of information about the man who had fought by Present Mic’s side when he handed Izuku the keys to his freedom.

The same man sitting somewhat awkwardly on his mother’s couch, looking simultaneously grim and like he would rather anywhere *but* here.

“Eraserhead?”

Izuku instantly regrets opening his mouth when dark eyes settle on his face, narrow but seemingly...curious. Izuku instinctively tightens his grip on Hitoshi’s hand, relishing in the soft brush of Hitoshi’s thumb over his pulse point. It anchors him down into the couch, preventing him from drifting too far from the present.

“That would be me. You’ve got a decent eye, kid.”

Izuku is proud of how little his voice shakes when he shrugs and sinks

back against the couch cushions. “You weren’t on d-duty when you arrested my father— it made tracking you down online a lot more d-difficult.’

The man— the *hero* sitting across from him blinks, eyes red and tired. Izuku wonders if the hero ever sleeps— then realises it’s 3pm and this is probably a time where the pro would usually *be* asleep. Which makes him feel ever so slightly guilty at the thought of having dragged this man out of bed in the equivalent of the middle of the night.

“I didn’t know there *were* any mentions of me.”

Izuku shakes his head, winding his free hand through the fringed edge of a couch cushion. “I had to dig for a long time to find anything, but it’s there. I had to trawl forums, f-fan videos, thousands of sites for even h-hints of you— there’s one place you w-were mentioned by name. M-most people wouldn’t connect the dots.”

There’s a long pause, wherein Izuku fidgets nervously in place and he sees his mother shooting a curious look to Present Mic. Hitoshi’s weight against his shoulder is warm, and Izuku has to stop himself from sinking back against it— Eraserhead is watching them both with an unreadable expression, something glinting in his eyes. “Yet you still managed it.”

Izuku hisses a breath through his teeth, lets air fill his lungs for several seconds and feels the unwelcome magma-hot confidence takes its place when he exhales. He doesn’t want Loki’s favour— he doesn’t *want* this fire in his veins. “You arrested him. I wasn’t going to *not* find out who did it.”

The dark haired hero hums noncommittally in response, and seems to be gearing up for another question before the blond man at his side

coughs loudly, deliberately. “Maybe we can save the interrogation on Midoriya-kun’s information seeking habits *later* , Eraser. We’re here for a reason after all.”

Eraserhead settles back against the couch cushions, face once again a blank mask. Izuku gets the distinct impression that the man is somewhat disgruntled at Mic’s words as he buries his face into the scarf around his neck.

Inko smiles, but it’s a brittle thing. “Yes, there is a reason. You told me to contact you with anything that came up and...”

Mic leans forward to balance his elbows on his knees, fingers splayed against each other and his chartreuse eyes shifted into that sharp clarity of a work mindset. From this angle, Izuku can see the way his palm shines like gold, even in the absence of light to reflect, and tucks the information to the back of his mind for later. “And I’m assuming something came up?”

Inko nods, nodding her head purposefully towards where Izuku and Hitoshi sit squished together on a large chair meant for one person but mostly perfect for two teens. “I need you to enact the Emergency Hero Foster clause.”

The blond man leans back, eyes wide. “Midoriya-san—“

“Inko, please.”

“ *Inko* -san, we can’t accept Izuku into that clause without due cause.”

Inko smiles, a razor thin curve of her lips. “That’s good, because it’s

not for Izuku. This,” she stretches out a hand, gesturing to the purple haired boy at Izuku’s side. He can feel Hitoshi shaking against his side and brushes his own thumb over the pulse point leaping frenetically in his friend’s wrist. “-is Shinsou Hitoshi. He’s the one I need you to take in. I-“

“Yet again, Inko-san— we have no evidence that would allow us to take him under the emergency foster system. I want to help but—“

Inko reaches to the side of the chair she is sitting in, grabbing her phone from the side table. Unlocking it with a quick series of taps, she turns it around and slides it across the coffee table— along with a familiar piece of leather that makes Izuku’s skin burn at the memory of it’s tight grip against a pale jaw. Hitoshi’s hold on his hand grows tighter, and Izuku feels pins and needles tingling in the tips of his fingers.

He would complain but—

Izuku is too distracted by the full body *flinch* that runs through the blond hero on their couch. He’s not blind to the way Eraserhead casually leans against Mic’s shoulder as he reaches for the leather— as if wanting to spare his partner having to touch it. The blond instead takes a deep breath and reaches for the phone instead, holding it so that the man beside him can see it easily.

“Is that enough evidence?”

Eraserhead swears quietly under his breath at the first photo on the screen and glances to Izuku’s mother. “More than.”

Their faces darken the more Mic slides through the gallery, each successive movement of the screen seemingly driving their anger

deeper. After a few minutes, wherein Izuku's hand really has lost all feeling and Hitoshi shakes like a leaf against his side, Mic places the phone on the coffee table with fingers that tremble.

He seems hesitant to speak— so Eraserhead takes over after a long moment. “Shinsou Hitoshi, huh. That sounds fami—“ His gaze turns sharp, as if he's suddenly connected the dots. “The Morpheus case?”

Izuku *feels* more than sees the wince on Hitoshi's face, the slow nod the taller teen gives the pro hero. The dark-haired man just breathes out a long, slow breath in response and scrubs a rough hand down his face. Eraserhead looks like he's aged another few years in the last five minutes, eyes somehow more tired than before. “We can't take him.”

Hitoshi's grip falls away instantly, the smallest ember of hope faded in a single moment and Izuku starts as his mother blinks in shock. “What do you mean you *can't* ? The evidence is right there— it's *enough* !”

Mic seemingly blinks back into full awareness in that moment, both hands rising in front of his chest and waving rapidly. “No, not like that! It's just that *we* can't take him. We're both in a tricky position right now— Eraserhead's underground long term missions at this stage make it dangerous for us to take in a foster child, even an emergency one. Given Shinsou-kun's status under a witness protection program, it could potentially place him in more danger than necessary to be placed with us.”

Inko settles back in her chair, brief anger fading away and she lets her fists unclench slowly. “I... That would make sense, I apologise for making an assumption. If you can't take him, what would you suggest? I don't want to file the case paperwork before I know Shinsou-kun is going to be safe first.”

There's only the ticking of the clock and the barking of a dog

somewhere in the unit building to fill the next silence, before Mic breaks it with a soft exclamation. “If you’ll excuse me, I have to make a call.” With a hurried bow, he digs his phone out of a pocket and makes his way to the front door, already murmuring as quietly as possible into the receiver.

Eraserhead turns to them in the quiet that follows, face still half-hidden in the grey scarf around his neck. It makes it even harder to guess at what the look in his gaze is, with half of his face removed from view. He is still holding the muzzle, fingers tense and knuckles white with pressure.

“This isn’t regulation, nor is it your size.”

It’s clearly aimed at Hitoshi, who has yet to speak a word this entire meeting— Izuku is just glad that the assurance of his fingers tangled with his has finally returned. He squeezes back, catching Hitoshi’s pale gaze with a soft smile and nodding encouragingly.

“No, it’s not.”

Eraserhead nods distractedly, fingers tugging at the back locking mechanism. “How long ago did they get this for you?”

Hitoshi shrugs, a distant expression taking over his face. “That wasn’t from the Masamura’s.”

“They’re your current family?”

Hitoshi nods, staring down at where Izuku’s thumb is rubbing at the junction of his palm and wrist. “Yeah, they’re the ones who took me

in.”

“So not a *family* ?”

Hitoshi jerks up, scanning the carefully neutral expression on Eraserhead’s face for a long moment before he nods, shallow. “No, not a family.”

“So, if it wasn’t them—then who?”

Hitoshi blinks, like he’s trying to remember something buried in the back of his mind. “Oda family, I think, maybe five years ago?”

Eraserhead is nodding along, like this is a casual conversation that has no effect on him, the tightness of his grip around the muzzle in his hands speaks volume to the contrary. His voice is still deceptively calm, slow and measured. “You know this is illegal, right?”

Izuku *burns* at the confusion on Hitoshi’s face, a wildfire building in his veins that has nothing to do with Loki and instead it’s entirely his own fury. “They used it because they were scared of my quirk— what else were they going to do?”

“Things like *this* ,” Here, the hero shakes the piece of leather in the space between them and stops when he sees the half-aborted flinch travelling across Hitoshi’s face. “They’re illegal because they make things *worse* . Kid, there’s nothing more dangerous than *fearing* your own quirk. Anybody who gave a *shit* would’ve put you in quirk counselling the minute yours made itself known.”

Izuku wants to remain angry, because people had *hurt* Hitoshi—but



instead, the look on his face douses the flames, renders them wet ash and dead embers in his chest. Hitoshi has had Izuku to assure him for months, that there is nothing to fear from his quirk— but Izuku knows there's a mountain of difference between hearing it from a friend and from a pro.

Eraserhead opens his mouth as if to continue, but Mic returns at that exact moment with a terse smile on his face and phone tucked away in a pocket once again. "We've got someone willing to take him in."

Izuku's mother, who has been quietly watching the exchange between Hitoshi and Eraserhead with little input, interjects now. "Are you sure you can trust them?"

Mic grins, a genuine expression as he chuckles. "I think the number four Pro Hero is about as trustworthy as you can get, Inko-san! But—" He turns to where Hitoshi is still half pressed against Izuku's side, gaze softening and smile warmer. "Is that okay with *you* , Shinsou-kun?"

Hitoshi blinks, pale eyes wide in disbelief. "Does it matter if it isn't?"

Mic sighs, crouches so that he's level with the purple haired teen, but far enough away to keep him from feeling pressured. "Why *wouldn't* it matter?"

"Because it hasn't ever mattered before."

It's like a shutter closes in Mic's green-yellow eyes for a split second, and Izuku gets the distinct feeling the blond hero isn't entirely seeing the present moment when he replies, voice hoarse. "It *does matter* now. Is it okay for us to pass you into the custody of Best Jeanist? If not, we'll ring every contact we have until you're comfortable with the choice."

Hitoshi gapes for a long moment, hand tight around Izuku's eyes before he shakes his head slowly, gaze never leaving Mic's. "That's.. that's fine. I trust..." He shakes his head again, rapidly— it turns Izuku's heart cold in his chest. "Best Jeanist is fine."

Mic nods back, shifting his weight back as he stands up from the awkward crouch. "Then we had best be off."

Izuku blinks, heart free falling in his chest. "You mean h-he's going now? Right now?"

Izuku wants Hitoshi to be safe— but only now does the realisation dawn on him that it means Hitoshi has to *leave* . He wants nothing more to see Hitoshi away from the Masamura's, to never see bruises like that on his friend's skin ever again but Izuku hadn't accounted for the fact that he might never see Hitoshi again after this.

*Hitoshi is going to leave.*

Izuku has so little in life: he's always had his mother, and now he has Hitoshi.

It is right to let Hitoshi go and Izuku wants nothing more than to be selfish, right here.

Instead, he squeezes Hitoshi's hand as tightly as he can and breathes out a deep breath as Mic nods in reply, as if he understands what he's asking of them. There's an oddly nostalgic air between the two heroes, as if they are watching something like a memory unfold before them. "T-then... Then you'd best get going."

Izuku doesn't realise he's crying until Hitoshi wipes at the wetness on his cheeks— pale eyes just as watery. “You gotta look after Kabocha for me, Izuku. An-and make sure Hojicha gets attention at the cafe and that the Kirishima's know I'm okay an-and you gotta sock Takeda in the face if he pulls that crap again—“

Whatever else had been going to pour out of Hitoshi's mouth is cut off when Izuku wraps his arms around his friend and squeezes as tightly as he possibly can. It's not much, given as he's a weedy thirteen year old but the feel of Hitosh's arms wrapping around him in turn is enough.

All too soon, Izuku lets his arms fall away from around Hitoshi and pulls back to wipe furiously at the tears in the corners of his eyes. “I... I'll look after the street cats and y-you look after *you*. ”

The last glimpse Izuku sees of his best friend is just before the door shuts behind him, in that last gap between the door and wooden frame. Hitoshi shoots him a smile that trembles at the edges— and then he is gone.

Izuku's hand is cold.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

The day after Hitoshi leaves, Izuku returns to school: and he does so alone.

He makes the journey through the streets far earlier than he had

planned and waits on instinct at the gate of the unit block like he has for weeks now. It takes him long, numb moments to remember Hitoshi won't be meeting him— to remember that the desk behind him will be empty.

They've done the best thing they could have done. Hitoshi is safe and he's away from the Masamura family—

They've done the *right* thing.

Izuku wishes they hadn't. For one bitter, burning, *angry* moment— Izuku wishes he had been selfish and done the *wrong* thing for once in his goddamn life.

Izuku is cognisant enough, *self* aware enough, to know that he is irreparably changed by his life. He knows the teenagers around him do not need corners against their backs before they can breath deep enough to matter. They don't understand the bitter welling of fear, hot like tar and sulfur in his chest— it is absent for them.

His classmates go home to food on their tables, to adults who want what is best for them. It's not a criticism— Izuku is *glad* they are safe. Just because he is envious of their lives doesn't mean he wishes they didn't have them, because one life like Izuku's is enough. He is happy they are happy but yet—

Izuku wishes they could understand, when they scoff at the empty seat behind Izuku. Takeda glances only once to where Izuku sits and he wants to look away— the brunet boy looks deeply uncomfortable, perturbed by the distinct absence of Izuku's best friend.

But Izuku holds his gaze, and Takeda looks away first.

The sight of the abrasion on Takeda's nose is apparently enough to deter anyone from making any comments about Hitoshi, at least in his hearing range.

Izuku ignores the sticky residue of red flowers on his hands and spends most of his day staring out the window. He watches the breeze high above their heads shift the clouds across the sky, watches the birds tending a nest in the corner of the window inset. It's too early for them to nest— Izuku has watched them build three nests in the time he's been at Tokage Junior High.

The first had been too weak to survive a gale storm that blew in from the south— Izuku had seen the wreckage the next day. The birds begin another the next day, tirelessly working to build a place to raise a family.

This one, too, falls victim to a storm. Izuku finds the wreckage of an egg near the doors to the school, and wonders why the birds are so desperate to build, when it is too early to make a good life.

This nest is well constructed, made of sticks and twine and stolen straws— the gleam of white shells is just visible to his gaze. Izuku wonders how long it will take for this one to go— whether these birds will ever give up building in a place that has no future.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

It takes two weeks for Izuku to find a new project, which is at least a week longer than he had anticipated.

It comes about like this:

There's a soup kitchen, attached to a shelter— he passes it every morning on the way to school. He's not blind to the people who live on the street, though Izuku will readily admit he has no idea how he is meant to speak to them. Anything he would offer feels wrong, *fake* — he cannot offer sympathy because they don't *want* it.

Izuku realises quite quickly that the shelter is popular for several reasons, the most important of which: they don't turn away the quirkless.

Something hot and angry twists in his gut, to see the welcoming sign that explicitly states their plan to provide care and food to all individuals. The heavily underlined 'INCLUDING THE QUIRKLESS' turns something in his chest bitter and heavy.

It weighs on him, day after day, until he can take no more.

"Hey mum," he stirs the soup in his bowl disinterestedly, pokes at the tofu. "Would you be okay with me volunteering at a shelter kitchen?"

Across the table, his mother sips at her tea and peers at him over the edge of the cup. "I don't see any reason why not— what brought this on?" She sets the cup down, and rests her hands together on the edge of the table as she speaks.

Izuku hums, considering his words carefully before he speaks. "I think... I think it's the right thing for me to do. I didn't realise it was such a huge problem and I can't take the world the way I *want* to without a quirk but..."

Inko taps the table thoughtfully. “But you can do this.”

Izuku nods, eyes on the plate before him. “I can do this.”

Izuku’s mother seems to think it over for a few minutes, as he makes a halfhearted attempt to eat at least some of his food. It feels wrong, to sit at a table meant for three.

“I’ll run it by Present Mic, but I think the last communication stated that they think the danger zone has mostly passed by now.”

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

He does get the go ahead, in the end: by the next morning, his mother informs him that the team attached to their case has reassessed the danger levels— minimal seems to be the consensus, as they’ve managed to go a few weeks without major incidents.

So he gets the go ahead.

Along with Hitoshi’s new number, which he keys into his phone and immediately sends every photo he has taken of the street cats this week.

**12:58**

*MI: LOOK! Kabocha is so fat— she’s just about ready to pop!*

...

He begins typing, then stops.

...

...

...

Izuku backspaces once again and shakes his head, frustrated in his inability to find the right words to convey how awful it has been for the last two weeks.

*MI: I hope you're settled in okay! Mic only just got this number to me, so I can't wait to hear back from you! Hopefully this number is right, haha!*

*MI: <https://musutafumessenger.co.jp/local/> fostersystem-mayhem-local-family-under-investigation/*

*MI: this came out an hour ago, just after mum filed the report*

*MI: there's no mention of you, just so you know*

There's no immediate reply but as Izuku ducks into the shelter, he finds himself grinning. He might not be able to see Hitoshi— but this



is the next best thing.

The weather outside is tepid, just warm enough that Izuku has foregone his usual jacket but cool enough that he's still elected to wear long jeans. And as he opens the door and looks around, he's greeted with a surprisingly familiar face.

“Kirishima-san?”

The dark haired woman stacking the chairs across the room blinks over an armful of folded metal chairs and grins, all long canines and jagged teeth. “Midoriya-chan! What are you doing here?”

Izuku blinks in surprise, cursing at the stutter that leaks back into his voice. “I-I.. I came to volunteer? It’s just that...” The longer he speaks, the quieter gets and he rallies what little enthusiasm he can to continue. “Without Hitoshi, there’s uh... there’s not a lot left, y’know?”

Kirishima Shiho smiles kindly, and Izuku gets the distinct impression that she really *does* know what he means. “It’s good of you, to keep thinking of other people. We always need a hand here— what can you do?”

Izuku grins shakily, closing the door behind and Kirishima waves him over to a large counter dividing the seating area and what seems to be a large industrial kitchen. He sighs as he sits, stretching out his legs underneath the table as the dark haired woman settles across from him. “I’m g-good for mostly anything, really. I, uh... I like talking with people and I’m decent in the kitchen...and I just want to help. In another life, I probably would’ve been one of them, being quirkless and a-all...”

Shiho smiles softly, no teeth— just a gentle, empathetic curve of her mouth. “Most of the people we help never really thought they would end up where they are now either. It sounds like you’ve got a good head on your shoulders and a good heart to match— not everyone wants to help our shelter in particular.”

Izuku nods as Shiho drags two cups across to the table and a cold bottle of water, accepting one gratefully. “Yeah, I, uh... I read the sign. Is it really that uncommon?”

The dark hair woman avoids his gaze for a long moment, seemingly intent on the grain of the burnished metal top. Belatedly, Izuku can see the flutter of what he thinks are gills at the junction of her neck and shoulders, previously hidden by the cafe uniform. “For some of us, it is. Mutants and the quirkless share similar treatments by society these days.”

“A-and what about the godless?”

She grimaces, mouth twisted tight. “Same story, different words. That part of your story as well?”

Izuku wobbles a hand in the air, shrugging his shoulders. “M-more or less.”

Shiho smiles then, all teeth and lips stretched wide as she runs a finger through the moisture left behind by her cup and leans forward, fist hanging in the air. “Yeah, we godless folks gotta stick together.”

It takes him a long, *long* moment to connect the dots. “Y-you too?”

She grins, fist still hanging. “Yeah, me too! You gonna leave me hanging here?”

Almost by instinct, he touches a fist to hers and smiles instinctively in response to the wide grin she sends the awkward gesture. “Man, my wife is gonna love you! We’ve got a kid about your age too, you’ll probably meet him once you really start here!”

“Y-you’re okay with me volunteering?” He stammers out, wondering exactly this seems to be going so easily. Maybe it’s the lifetime of struggle, but Izuku really had been gearing up for having to convince her.

“Of course! Any friend of Shinsou-kun is a good friend of ours and, as I said— you’ve got a good heart. I think you’ll be good for the people we help back onto their feet— and they might just be good for *you* too.” With a push out from the table, the cheerful woman steps off her stool and turns to grab a small pile of paperwork.

Seeing his overwhelmed expression at the bundle of paperwork, Shiho chuckles and shakes the papers. “Don’t worry, most of this is example schedules and volunteer conduct info! The only thing you’ll really need to get signed is a permission form for your mother and a signed document to say you’ve agreed to abide by the conduct document. Easy peasy!”

With a grin to match hers, Izuku takes the bundle of paper and sees that it is mostly pamphlets and helpful information. He drinks the last of the water, and when Shiho offers him a fist bump, returns the gesture with considerably more enthusiasm than he had the last. “Easy!”

Izuku leaves the shelter with what feels like a whole horde of

butterflies fluttering around inside his stomach and the warm glow of hope clutched between his fingers. He's going to help however he can — he's doing the right thing, and maybe this one right thing won't make him want to curse the world.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

He's halfway home, having stopped into the convenience store for groceries, when his phone buzzes in his pocket, a successive *tap tap* of his custom settings. Hitoshi's specific pattern. It's not until he gets home and wrestles open the unit door with his elbows that he's finally able to set the bags down in the kitchen for his mother and head upstairs to check his phone.

Once he's in his room, Izuku falls back against his bed and shimmy's his phone out of his pocket with minimal difficulty. Unlocking it with a quick series of numbers, he opens the message and grins at the bright blue 'One unread message' that hovers at the top of the screen. Tapping on the unread chat, he rolls onto his stomach and rests his chest on his pillow.

**14:23**

***Best friend (Toshi!)***

*BF: aaa*

There's a moving picture depicting a very excited child screaming dramatically after that message and Izuku can't help the snort that comes out instead of a laugh.

*BF: she looks huge! Has nao-sensei said anything about her yet?*

*BF: its good so far. hakamata-san is very fair, and he reminds me a little of you. i hadn't seen the article yet, but i'm not surprised.*

It's followed by a selfie— Hitoshi settled on a beige couch with a frankly huge grey and white cat spread across his lap. Izuku thinks the feline probably rivals Hojicha at the cat cafe— but he's more distracted by the fact that even by the smallest of margins, Hitoshi is *smiling* . He's healthy and bright and the bruise has faded completely from his face— he looks happy.

*BF: he has a cat, this is Kochi!*

Izuku snuggles his chin down into the pillow between his arms and smiles, quickly copying the image and making it Hitoshi's contact photo in his phone. It's not like the other boy will know regardless and Izuku—

He just wants to keep a permanent reminder that Hitoshi is *safe* .

He did the *right* thing.

# emergence and emergencies part 3

## Chapter Notes

Sighhhhhh

Look at this point I don't even know why I have a posting schedule cause I never follow the damn thing ;-; just assume it means I'll post once a week at least 🤖

Anyway! Have a nice chapter! I'm being very nice to y'all, I assure you ! Also wow Kirishima ran away from me in this chapter and I adore him so much

Come yell at me!

[Discord](#)

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

## Chp 13

Previously:

Izuku snuggles his chin down into the pillow between his arms and smiles, quickly copying the image and making it Hitoshi's contact photo in his phone. It's not like the other boy will know regardless and Izuku—

He just wants to keep a permanent reminder that Hitoshi is *safe* .

He did the *right* thing.

The shelter is for helping those who need it, Izuku knows this — loves this, craves to help, spends every moment not tied to other responsibilities in his life toting and carrying and cooking and *helping* . Izuku relishes in the hard work, in carrying groceries to other soup kitchens and from the dawn markets on the weekends.

Izuku pours every scrap of himself into the shelter and expects nothing back, and is bowled over by the kindness of those around him.

He had come here to *help* , but he hadn't thought of the fact that a community like the ones that formed in shelters and kitchens, the one he has helped forge among the younger shelter occupants — the teenagers, the runaways that they turned a blind eye to, the young adults suffering under the crippling weight of a world that has given them nothing but has taken from them, everything.

A community that builds itself against mutual struggle, against the hunger and the cold and the hatred of a society determined to drive them away, to *outlast* them: such a community would never turn away someone who needed help.

And at some point, maybe it takes a week— maybe it takes a month of watching kind eyes and scarred hands and shoulders that pull down, shrinking from touch. Maybe it takes even more, but the community takes to Izuku with the inherent understanding that he is one of *theirs*

And it happens a little like this.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

Izuku helps Takahashi Ito regain his job. He has no idea what the man will go on to be — just that the suit Izuku finds in his dad's old things fits him well and Takahashi cries when he looks in the mirror.

Izuku knows the man lost his job because a manager didn't want him to take over a project and wanted the full pay out. He knows that Takahashi is an engineer. He knows he likes to play chess and feed the birds at the park with his sandwich crumbs. Takahashi's wife died the week after he lost his job and he's been sleeping outside the shelter for six months.

Izuku knows that Takahashi Ito wears his father's suit and gets his job.

He doesn't know that Takahashi Ito will end up the head manager of a hero support item design team, and that his help will be invaluable in the future, that the mark of Hephaestus grows bright and red and *thankful* against his bones.

Because Izuku had not seen *opportunity* in the man.

Izuku had seen a man worth helping, who grew tired and gaunt in the streets. Izuku just wanted to do the *right* thing.

But Takahashi Ito?



Takahashi Ito finds a hero in a soup kitchen. And he will tell the entire world about the boy who gave a damn when nobody else did.

And in the meantime?

Takahashi teaches the boy who gives him his life back how to play chess, how to care for a blade and how to always, always, *always* strike first and run like the devil is on his heels.

Takahashi Ito is a man who teaches Izuku how to survive.

..◆□□□□□□ ◡ □□□□□□◆..

Izuku's been working at the shelter for two weeks before he finally meets Shiho's wife and son, just after the Sunday midday rush. The shelter is hot, the smell of food rising with steam from the kitchen — the smell of vegetables cooked until soft and the tang of the toaster burning breadcrumbs in the catch tray.

He's wiping down the collapsible tables, one by one; it's far easier to keep the space clear when they're able to pack it all up in a few moments and Shiho said they often lend out tables when surrounding organisations have need of them. Izuku likes being lost in the repetition: sweeping the crumbs away, spraying the plastic and scrubbing at stains. It's constant, physical work, and it feels *good* to do.

Izuku hadn't really been sure of his choice, at the start. He'd spent a whole week buzzing and stressing and chewing at the sides of his thumbnail about whether he was doing the right thing, whether he could actually help. The Friday before his first Saturday shift at the shelter had been a numb whirlwind of halfhearted note-taking and giddy, excited anticipation.

But now, Izuku waves to the last of the stragglers making their way out the door and blinks as the door opens immediately afterwards. He straightens up as he sees Shiho, already halfway through an excited wave before he realises she isn't alone.

The tall woman behind her isn't an unfamiliar figure, though Izuku has yet to formally meet her and the teenager boy with them is someone he definitely hasn't met yet. He's fairly sure this is Shiho's family, and he feels his stomach clench with something like nervousness.

"Kirishima-san!" He's addressing Shiho, but the other two also swing their gazes to meet Izuku. Yeah, this is definitely her family. "I didn't know you were stopping in today!"

Shiho grins, sharp and kind. "We were in the area and I did promise to introduce you to my family, y'know! This is my wife, Himari." The tall woman behind her nods her head, eyes a vibrant red and just as outwardly kind as Shiho's. Izuku's starting to think that the entire Kirishima family is just composed of pure kindness.

But Izuku's also see how sharp Shiho's smile can be, when trouble comes to their door.

"And our son, Eijirou. He's in the same year as you, at Musutafu Private." Izuku bows to each of them, quick and nervous, before grinning somewhat shakily. He's been making leaps forward in talking to strangers — he's forced to, with the shelters constantly revolving cast of lunch goers and old faces mixed with the new on a daily basis.

"It's great to meet you b-both! Kirishima-san...uh—" Izuku fidgets, wondering whether it would be rude to use their first names to avoid

confusion.

“Just use our names, pipsqueak.” Himari’s voice, when she speaks for the first time, is deeper than Izuku had expected from her appearance but musical to the ear, a low alto. Calm and measured, Izuku feels like the woman is a tree rooted in rock— immovable. “There’s far too many Kirishimas in this building to pay much heed to social niceties.”

The dark haired boy next to her just grins, all sharp teeth; Izuku thinks it should be intimidating but oddly enough it just makes him want to give him a hug. It’s oddly endearing.

“Are you sure that’s okay?” Izuku’s not exactly a stickler for the rules — but he’s also been taught that being polite meant *safety* .

Himari goes to answer, mouth curving in a smile but Eijirou jumps in, almost literally. The dark-haired boy seems to materialise into existence in front of Izuku in the brief moment he takes his eyes off him, his smile wide enough to curve his eyes closed. “Of course you can, but it’s totally manly of you to make sure! Like Ma said, there’s way too many Kirishimas here to bother with that.”

Izuku nods, a little unsure still but not really wanting to push the issue too far. The other boy is unexpectedly close, and Izuku doesn’t exactly know how to make space for himself without being overly rude about it. He’s better with it now, the casual way people step into each other’s personal space — but he’s still learning how to be better with it.

Luckily the dark haired teenager seems to recognise it, and steps back just enough to give Izuku some breathing room. Izuku nervously wipes his hands on his pants, drying off the last of the antiseptic spray from the tables. “S-Shiho-san, the Tanagawa family wants to know if we’ve got space for someone else in the shelter tonight...”

Shiho turns to him after a moment, drawn from a quiet but seemingly intense conversation with her wife. “I think we should have room! I’ll go check our logs and see if we’re reaching capacity. Tobiko-chan should know.”

Izuku grins in response to her own sharp grin, the infectious good cheer. Himari nods to her son, before following behind Shiho with what Izuku thinks is a mix of resignation and fond affection— who is now halfway across the room muttering as she walks towards the offices.

Eijirou hangs back, hands lax at his sides before he scratches at his chin awkwardly. “Do you need a hand packing this up? I know the lunch rush always takes it out of you, especially the weekend ones. Oh and, it’s uh... nice to finally meet you! Mum talks about you all the time.”

“Oh, I-uh... Midoriya Izuku.”

Izuku nervously wipes his hand once again, as Eijirou reaches out for a handshake and he attempts to work down the blush from the fact that Shiho had been *talking about him* . When Izuku takes it and looks up to smile, all he can see are red-upon-red eyes, dark and blood-garnet and *kind* —

Oh.

It’s the wrong shade, he drums into his head repeatedly, wrong shade, wrong shape— Eijirou’s eyes aren’t true red— they are soft, the colour of rust and ironic rich dust, and they are certainly far kinder than the

red eyes in his memories. He's spacing out and he comes back to Eijirou waving a hand in the air, trying to catch his attention.

"S-sorry, I totally spaced out there. What were you saying?"

"No worries. I was just asking if you still wanted help— it goes a lot faster with more hands!" Eijirou gestures to the dozen or so white plastic tables left in the space, smiling wide. "I'm an old hand at it, so we should get through it in no time!"

Izuku blinks and returns the smile. "A-ah! Sure, I'll grab some s-spare cleaning cloth?"

Eijirou heads to a nearby table as Izuku speaks, already brushing off crumbs. "Sure, man, sounds like a plan."

By the time Izuku returns with an extra spray bottle, Eijirou has swept the worst of the crumbs off the table and is scratching at what looks like salt stuck to the table. Handing the spray to the other with a tremulous quirk of his lips, Izuku turns to another table and they work in silence for what feels like several long minutes.

"So, dude. What made you want to volunteer at the shelter?" Eijirou speaks into the relative silence, previously broken only by the squeak of cleaning cloth and the liquid-hiss of antiseptic spray on the plastic.

Izuku startles a little, cloth skidding across the plastic before he collects himself. "I... I could've been like the people here. Some days, we weren't far off from coming here. It would've been the only place to take us. You help people and I want to h-help. It felt like.. the right thing for me to do?"

It's quiet for a long, tense moment and Izuku is seriously wondering if he has said something wrong before he hears the slight sound of a snuffle. When he turns to see where the noise has come from, he's greeted with Eijirou clutching a cloth tight between two hands and his eyes almost dramatically wet with tears. "S-sorry, did I say something wrong?" he says frantically. "A-ah, I'm sorry!"

"That's the manliest reasoning ever, dude!" Eijirou half stammers out, not quite crying but Izuku is almost worried by how wet his eyes are. "I think that's the best reason for helping! You'd make a great hero with that mindset!"

Izuku feels his hands go hot, his bones itching beneath his skin like they want to break free. "A hero, huh?"

Eijirou smiles at him, sharp and somehow gentle, even with rows of shark-like teeth. "Yeah! Don't you want to be a hero, Midoriya?"

Izuku doesn't really know how to answer that. He's not sure he *knows* the answer or whether he wants to know at all. He thinks about it, for a long moment as he turns back to the table he is working on.

He's spent half a decade avoiding that dream, wanting that dream, craving a life where it might be possible. Now that it is a possibility — a world where he no longer lives flat under his father's thumb, with a *boon* under his belt — is that what he wants?

"I... I want to be my own kind of hero. I can't be the type of hero you will be one day, b-but..." he pauses, mulls the thoughts over and over in his brain. "I can help people, no matter what I do. That's the important part, right?"

Eijirou is gaping a little, wide eye as he stares and Izuku fidgets under

the warm light of what can only be *admiration* in Eijirou's, yet again, *alarmingly* damp eyes. "Bro..."

Izuku grins, awkward but not really sure what he's supposed to say at this point, so he tries somewhat clumsily to change the subject. "You want to be a hero, right? W-why don't you tell me about your quirk?"

Izuku must've said something wrong *this* time — the almost too-earnest shine to the boy's smile dims. He's really put his foot in it this time, 'it' being his mouth. He's gearing up to apologise, when Eijirou smiles— it's got that same edge of forced happiness to it that puts Izuku's nerves on edge.

"Oh, it's nothing special! Really, it's just a hardening quirk— like Ma's but it works across my entire body. Her quirk only works on her hands." Eijirou scrubs a hand across the back of his neck— like he's *embarrassed* .

"Eijirou, that's an *amazing* quirk; you could like, do *so much* with it! Is it an automatic skin response? Do you have to concentrate to activate it or to keep it *deactivated* ? What type of hardening, just surface level on the skin or does it extend throughout your dermal system? Is it a metal or biological hardening factor? Can I *see it* ? "

Eijirou blinks and Izuku immediately finds himself flushing, an instant beet red blush and his cheeks *burn* . "I-I.... I'm so *sorry* ! I get carried away a-and—"

"Do you... really think I can be a hero with a quirk like this? It's not... flashy, or anything. It's a *boring* quirk." There's a shroud of something hanging across Eijirou's shoulders, an open vulnerability in the hollow of his throat.

Izuku can't do anything but blink, for several long moments. There's something hot pooling in his chest, a rising golden tide that wants to spill out of his throat and he is helpless to halt the tide. "Why does it matter if it's *boring*— you could *save* people with it. Isn't that the important thing, isn't that what heroes *do* ?"

Eijirou is definitely gaping now, staring at Izuku with an expression he swears he's seen before, on a familiar face.

"Nobody has really ever... said that, y'know. It's always the heroes with flashy quirks that get the attention, the hype— I just thought I'd never really be man enough to be up there with them." Eijirou's voice is still cheerful but Izuku knows how easy it is to sound cheerful and have your mental state in tatters all in the same moment.

He hums, finishing the last of his table cleaning before he heads to where Eijirou is starting to collapse the table he has finished with. "I s-suppose that's true, in a way. But..." he swallows— wonders how often the boy across from him checks the news, and chokes down the fear. "A pair of heroes saved me and my mum— one of them had a flashy quirk and one had one that wasn't, and I know I'll be t-thankful to both of them forever. Because it didn't matter what their quirks were, they *saved us* ."

They seem to move in a mutual haze, as Izuku reaches to the centre of the table's underside and pulls the latch keeping it locked in place to the side. "Maybe it's... maybe it's the same for you?"

Eijirou smiles at him, full and bright— there's no lingering shadows of self doubt hanging at the corners of his mouth and Izuku feels warm all over at that smile. "That's the manliest thing anyone has ever told me, Midoriya! Maybe I've been focusing too much on what a hero *looks* like and not what they *do* !"



Eijirou's cheerful nature is apparently infectious it seems, as Izuku finds the grin growing across his face wider than it has been in weeks. In a moment, he knows he and Eijirou could be friends— *good* friends. He laughs at the bubble of joy sitting in his chest, nodding. "Yeah... but, regardless: you're gonna be the best hero ever. I've only k-known you for less than an hour but even I know you well enough to know that!"

Eijirou grins at that, eyes bright with tears and face a red flush. "Thanks, Midoriya!"

Izuku feels like his chest is going to burst open— his cheeks hurt from smiling. "H-hey, if I'm gonna call you E-Eijirou... you should probably call me Izuku!"

The dark haired teenagerage grins even wider and extends a fist out. When Izuku laughs and taps their knuckles together, Eijirou joins in. "Izubro it is!"

They finish with the tables in record time— and find themselves crammed together in a booth seat near the window. The afternoon sun is warm through glass, though it makes it hard to concentrate on the screen held between them.

"-so when they approach the obstacle, straight on and then—there, they dive forward like they're gonna go over!" Eijirou half-shouts, excitement clear in his voice as he gestures to the video on the screen.

"And then t-they... shift their weight back, instead of following through, so they land properly?"

Eijirou grins, eyes bright. "Yeah, that's exactly it! You catch on quick dude!"

It's of a runner— a free runner, Eijirou corrects. It seems like a terrifying, alluring mix between gymnastics and tightrope walking. The runner on the screen balances on the edges of buildings with seemingly no fear, feet steady and quick. They launch themselves over bars, in between gaps— leaping from building to building as if there's no drop beneath.

And they are quirkless.

It says it, right there in the channel name. QuirklessClimbs.

They are doing this all on their own merit. On the strength of their body, the grip of their hands, their *balance* —

*Izuku could do this.*

It's a terrifying, giddy, *overwhelmingly interesting* thought.

Eijirou is still rambling along— he's clearly well versed on the subject of parkour and freerunning, loves it dearly. And from the wording, Izuku would bet he *does* it as well.

And this?

Izuku wants to know how to do *this*.

“Hey, Eijirou?”

The boy hums in reply, shifting his attention from the screen.

“Could you teach me that? H-how to do stuff like that?” Izuku waits, watches the emotions scroll across Eijirou’s face.

As expected, Eijirou grins excitedly and nods. “Dude, of *course!* I’d love to show you what I know— it’s good fun!”

Izuku can’t help but get caught up in his new friend’s enthusiasm—it’s hypnotic and infectious, tugs his laughter up without strain and drives his anxiety deep down. Izuku feels like this around Hitoshi, and it’s nice to feel it now too.

Thinking Hitoshi, Izuku reaches for his own phone and waves it in front of Eijirou. “Hey, you know Hitoshi too, right?”

Eijirou, who seems to have lost himself in typing up what looks like a training plan, jerks his head up at that. “You’re in contact with Shinsou? Dude, absolutely! We used to at least chat a bit at the cafe before he got moved on.”

Izuku bites his tongue, tugs back the flood of anger that floods his veins as it always does when Izuku thinks of the Masamura family. He shakes himself, focusing.

“It might be nice to send him... a picture? Of both of us, I know he misses you and your mums.” Izuku fumbles at his phone screen, tapping until he finds the camera setting. Eijirou doesn’t really answer him, just grins pointedly at the camera and chucks up a peace symbol.

With a bright grin, Izuku copies the gesture and snaps a surprisingly nice picture. There's golden light from the window, bathing them in warm tones and they're both looking at the camera.

**Best friend (Toshi!)**

**13:12**

**MI:** *Look who I found today!! The Kirishimas all say hi!*

...

...

...

....

**BF :** *oh, say hi back for me!*

...

**BF:** *please ask kirishima eijirou how hojicha is. i know he loves that cat just as much as i do.*

Izuku grins down at his phone. "He wants to know how Hojicha is."

Eijirou throws back his head and almost howls with laughter. "Of

course he asks about the *cat* . Not like he disappeared or anything!” He shakes his head, smiling softly. “Tell him Hojicha is just as fat as before and shedding twice as much right now.”

**MI:** *He says Hojicha is just as fat as before and is super shedding right now!*

**MI :** *He’s right— I could’ve made a whole new cat out of the cat hair mum pulled off my jumper last time I visited!!*

...

...

...

His phone pings with a picture then— Hitoshi, lips barely curved at the camera and there’s a tall blond man in the background of the photo, smiling softly.

*Best Jeanist.*

Izuku has to restrain his excitement, not really wanting to clue Eijirou to the identity of Hitoshi’s new guardian.

**BF:** *hakamada and i are out buying cat food right now. i wish i could be where you guys are now.*

Izuku feels his heart like an ache in his chest, a deep muscle pain he’s

not sure can be eased by anything but proximity.

**MI:** *We all miss you here! Hopefully when things really settle down, you can come visit! Or we'll visit you!*

**BF:** *you don't have to do that izuku.*

Izuku frowns down at his phone, knowing exactly what Hitoshi is doing on the other end right now.

**MI :** *No, none of that Hitoshi! You deserve friends and I can't believe you've forgotten that in a month or so! All my hard work ruined!*

He adds a winking smile, just to make sure Hitoshi knows he's joking.

**BF:** *yeah yeah youre right. i hope you'll get to visit soon.*

Izuku grins and feels Eijirou looking over his shoulder to glance at the picture. Then takes a double take, blinking.

“Oh are you two dating?”

Izuku's turn to blink, nonplussed. “What?”

Eijirou points down to the messages— specifically to the contact initials. “BF stands for boyfriend.”

Izuku glances down, back to Eijirou and down again.

**BF .**

Izuku feels mortification drowning his face in a red glow and he attempts to stammer out an explanation that is mostly rapid denials.

“We’re just *friends!*” Izuku ends up half-wailing, red as a tomato.

Eijirou, the traitor, just roars in laughter and repeats the story to his mothers when they come to investigate.

It’s there, surrounded by the Kirishimas and knowing Hitoshi is safe, *happy*—

Izuku knows there’s a chance he can make this work.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

They hash out a schedule over the weeks that follow.

Izuku learns that he loves the way his feet hit the pavement in the early morning, puffing alongside Eijirou. He joins the boy for his runs in the mornings when he can, stretches with him when they are done. Izuku breathes in clean, fresh air as they duck over obstacles and run along gaps in sidewalk fences.

Izuku’s learning to love the taste of freedom.

It tastes like salt from the sea, like soda shared between friends and sounds like the slap of shoes against pavement, and like the ding of Hitoshi's message tone.

It tastes like a life Izuku wants to live forever.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

Life's not entirely good.

School...

School changes. There's no hiding behind Hitoshi's reputation anymore— and Izuku weathers the worst of the aftermath from the media leak entirely on his own. The suicide baiting is awful, something that sticks in his craw. It makes him gag to see those flowers.

But the bullying? It's something he knows how to deal with— even if this time, the right thing to do is to fight *back*.

He's not good at it.

Izuku ends up worse off than if he had just stayed down in the first place. He gets scrapes and bruises and he hides them as best he can from his mother. His mother, who takes one look at him and instantly knows what's going on.



But when he tells her, she nods, and tells him to let her know if it escalates.

The community at the shelter catch on and offer help: very specific, useful help.

Specifically, in the form of tips on fighting to survive, how to use everything at his disposal to *win* .

They teach him how to scrap, how to dodge and weave and how to use his parkour practice with Eijirou to his advantage. Ito teaches him how to avoid knives, Tomiko teaches him where best to hit and run if he needs to get away fast, and Tsuno?

Tsuno teaches Izuku how to fight as who he *is*. Izuku can't afford to forget some things in life — he's a boy, that's who and what he is. But he's not blessed with being born that way, has *made* himself into this person with sweat and tears and effort. It means he has to work harder, fight smarter, fight *dirtier* and Izuku has always liked those odds.

So Tsuno teaches him to fight in a way that makes his body rush, his nerves sing and he loves to move this way. Tsuno teaches him how to use the force of others, both physical and mental, against themselves.

*‘They will always underestimate you, if they think they know what you are. So use this against them,’* he says, tapping Izuku's skull with his knuckles. *“You’ve got double the brains of half the people I know, so use it.”*

Izuku learns a valuable lesson.

Izuku learns that he lives for, craves, *loves* the way a fight makes him feel alive.

So if he starts to look forward to the way bullies want to corner him in the dark hallways of the school?

He doesn't think he can be blamed.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Masasa Kaede used to be a writer— she had been good, back in her day. Maybe her words had touched a generation that no longer felt relevant — an age and a time where maybe being powerful and being ‘normal’ had been balanced on a knife edge. Writing — no, *speaking* to that generation had felt like an honour.

But her generation is gone. Her career is gone, her family is gone. Kaede is old, her bones ache in the cold, and she cannot always afford what she needs every week. She has to find a balance — groceries or her medications, rent or heating.

The soup kitchen helps with that. They don't mind her sticking around with the others near the heaters when it's cold out. The soup warms her hands and her belly, coils like Aphrodite herself in her joints. Eighty-five feels too old for this life now, and Kaede wonders whether she's done enough in this life to maybe get something in return.

Midoriya Izuku ends up being that.

He gives her toast for her soup when he can. He walks her home ( *slowly, slowly, ever so slowly, for her bones are getting frail and she measures the time passing in increments by pain in her joints*) whenever

he can. She looks forward to those days— stays longer till closing on those days so she can see the young one. He asks her questions — oh, so many questions. He is kind and sweet and so open and he brings her sweet blue flowers when she feels like giving up.

He feels like the child she couldn't have, and she aches with the reminder. But when it is Izuku, the ache feels less bitter and a little more like love. She is glad for this chance to help raise a child who so desperately wants to do the right thing.

On the day she dies, Masasa Kaede goes down to sleep with the thought that maybe Midoriya Izuku is the child her body couldn't give her.

Izuku attends her funeral.

He is the only mourner, clutching blue flowers in shaking, burned hands— there is no one else left to mourn her.

Masasa Kaede teaches the boy made of sunlight all the lessons she has bound in her bones: how to tie a tie, how to mimic the call of a spring sparrow and how to forget, just for a moment, the feeling of being trapped.

Masasa Kaede is a woman who teaches Izuku how to *live*.

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This is the crossroad, the meeting of paths— if one takes the path less travelled without meaning to, does it still make all the difference?

Izuku has chosen his way forward, even if he hadn't even known there was a choice.



# emergence and emergencies part 4

## Chapter Notes

AHAH a chapter on the right day, FEAR ME!

God I love Eijirou ;-;

Also there's a sister because I wanted one and Eijirou would make the best older brother ever fight me on it

Come yell at me!

[Discord](#)

I post snippets and other prompts I'm working on (;

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## PREVIOUSLY

Masasa Kaede teaches the boy made of sunlight all the lessons she has bound in her bones: how to tie a tie, how to mimic the call of a spring sparrow and how to forget, just for a moment, the feeling of being trapped.

Masasa Kaede is a woman who teaches Izuku how to live.

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This is the crossroad, the meeting of paths— if one takes the path less travelled without meaning to, does it still make all the difference?

Izuku has chosen his way forward, even if he hadn't even known there was a choice.

“So, what’s your quirk?”

Izuku freezes in the middle of a stretch, the burn from his hamstrings almost forgotten in his shock. They’re down at the beach— it’s probably somewhere near six am, the sidewalks deserted and the sky still the dusky pink of early morning. It’s cold enough to turn their panting breaths into clouds of white, dissipating in the sea breeze.

“W-what?”

Eijirou finishes his own stretch, shaking out the strain from his legs as he straightens up. “Well, you asked me when we met, about my quirk. I never got around to asking about yours!”

Izuku can’t detect a single trace of malice in his friend’s voice, and doesn’t really think Eijirou is the type to ask this question to hurt him. It still makes his heart drop to his feet.

There’s no right choice— there’s a lie and there’s the truth, and Izuku is hard pressed to decide what he’s meant to say. So he sighs and eases out from the stretch, glad to finally relieve the tension in his legs. “I’m quirkless.”

Eijirou blinks, somewhat confused. “Really? I thought, well...” He gestures somewhat vaguely to Izuku’s hands, and the burns that sit across his palms.

Izuku looks down, at the dark patches of old scarring. “Ah... I can see where you could get that idea from. It was an altar accident when I was presented, n-nothing to do with quirks.”

Eijirou glances away then, and Izuku wonders what emotion passes across his face in the moments it is out of sight. There’s something insidious in his gut that whispers in paranoid tones, that Eijirou is hiding contempt or anger— but Izuku is well versed in avoiding his own doubtful heart.

*Eijirou is a good friend*, he thinks to himself, *and if Hitoshi trusts him, so do I*. It’s easier to trust in Hitoshi sometimes, Izuku finds: it feels freeing to trust him, to know there’s someone else there who Izuku can rely on.

And watching Eijirou smile as he turns back to face him, Izuku thinks maybe he might be another person to trust in the future.

“I think it’s cool, to be honest.” Eijirou says, as he reaches one arm straight up to the sky to stretch out his side. “It’s not like quirks help us with everything anyway— my quirk makes me too heavy to really help me with running or jumping. It makes it *harder* to do things, most of the time.” He shrugs, switches arms. “Quirkless people don’t have advantages from a quirk but they also don’t have *disadvantages* from a quirk. Like a blank slate, yeah?”

Izuku pauses in the middle of his leg stretch, gaping at the boy next to him. “D-do you really think that?”

“Why wouldn’t it be true? I know a kid who can blow bubbles out of her nose as her quirk— it’s not like her having a quirk instantly makes her more likely win a race against you, right?”

Izuku hums in thought, taking a long sip from his water bottle as he mulls the thought over in his mind. “I-I guess you’re right? I just haven’t really heard anyone say that, ever.”

“Surely your mum would’ve said it before! You said she’s super nice and supportive, so she must’ve been okay with it.” Eijirou points out, joining Izuku as he sags onto a nearby step and takes a gulp out of his water bottle. It’s clearly new and as Izuku watches his friend chew casually on the opening of the bottle, he wonders how often the sharp-toothed boy has to replace things.

“Water bottles are like... monthly? Toothbrushes are weekly, and I have my own special set of cutlery like Ma does. They last about a year or so usually! That’s not really a reply though, dude.” Eijirou grins, still chewing on the plastic lid of the bottle.

Izuku flushes in an instant, clapping a hand over his mouth as pure mortification rushes over him. “Gods, I’m so s-sorry! I’m really working on the whole ‘not speaking out loud’ thing, I p-promise!”

Eijirou just laughs around the plastic against his lips, waving a hand between them. “Dude, it’s not a problem! I think it’s super manly to be curious— you should ask more questions like that! It’s like a game of twenty questions, kinda fun!”

Izuku’s face is still red as he reaches for his water once again, taking care not to drink too much. They’ve still got a run back towards home, and he doesn’t want to be waterlogged for the rest for the morning.

“So...”



Izuku tries to think if he's ever actually heard his mother say something like that.

Alarmingly, he's coming up blank. Izuku has no memories of his mother talking about his quirklessness, no memories aside from her desperate apologies the day he found out he was quirkless. It has become a non-issue: they had become too busy trying to survive to really ever discuss it.

Yet—

Izuku feels like he is missing something, a piece of the puzzle that is vital to the whole. He and his mother had spent those quiet days talking, between the visits from Hisashi— about her quirk, about his godlessness, about things on TV.

So if they had taken the time to talk about those things, why does he have no memories of kind words about being quirkless? Why can Izuku not remember a *single moment* where his mother had strayed into the topic, even if only by accident?

The thought drives something cold and dark into the gap of his chest — his skin feels cold, even under the flush of exertion.

Eijirou seems to see his shift in mood, immediately springing up from the stair and placing his water bottle down. “Hey— you wanted to see my quirk right? Why don't I show you before we head back?”

Izuku shunts the cold creeping through his chest to the side after a long moment, forcibly moving past and hoping he has time to sort it out before he has to go home. He forces himself to nod, drags his focus to the present moment as quickly as possible, and the conversation shift is a welcome change.

It helps because Izuku really *is* interested in this. Eijirou's quirk is fascinating— it's a combination of different aspects of his parent's quirks from what he can piece together and he's been dying to ask Eijirou to show him. It's an awkward request though, so Izuku leaps at the opportunity.

“Yes! I'd really, *really* like to see it! Maybe I can help you think of ways you can use it, for heroics, y-you'll need ideas for when you get to UA!”

Eijirou blinks at him as Izuku stands, placing his drink bottle next to the other teen's. “Y-you think I can get into UA? It's the best there is, y'know... everybody tries to get in there.”

Izuku sighs as his back cracks, swinging his arms forward and back. “E-exactly, it's the best of the best. That's where you want to go, right? Like Hitoshi.”

Eijirou nods, a smile falling from his face. “It's my first choice, when I get to submit my preferences. But...” The dark haired teen shrugs. “I just don't know if I'm good enough, y'know?”

And Izuku does know. He's spent a lifetime wondering whether there would ever been a chance for him to be good enough, to be *enough* . Even now, with only his own mind and Hitoshi to encourage him onward, Izuku ponders almost daily whether his dedication is worth it.

“I-... I guess I can understand that, a little but isn't the whole point of a hero school that they're g-going to *teach* you how to be a hero?” Izuku bounces on the balls of feet as he waits for Eijirou. “It's n-not like they expect you to be a hero coming into the course— just that

you have the potential to be something good for others.”

Eijirou’s face is oddly solemn as he meets Izuku’s gaze, something open and vulnerable behind his eyes. “D-do you think I do? Have potential, that is?”

Izuku blinks, lips curving up in a grin. “E-Eijirou, your quirk turns you into a d-defensive shield and you want to protect people. That’s like... like potential enough to fill a dozen applications!”

Eijirou’s eyes are damp as he grins, tension seeping from his shoulders as he finally faces Izuku fully. “Yeah, you’re right! Just gotta keep trying, yeah?”

Izuku laughs at the almost mercurial shift in mood, extending a hand out in a fist. “Plus Ultra, right?”

Eijirou joins in his laughter, tapping his fist and wiggling his fingers with an exaggerated explosion sound effect. “Heck yeah dude, Plus Ultra!”

Their laughter peaks for a long moment, dissolving into giggles and soft gasping laughter. It feels good to laugh in the early morning. There’s a few other joggers who stare at the two of them.

Izuku feels like there should be a leeway given to teenagers hyped up on adrenaline and good memories, even early in the morning.

Eventually, their laughter dies down and Eijirou gestures to his bare arms. “Did you still wanna see my quirk?”

Izuku finds himself nodding quickly, as Eijirou readies his hands out in front of himself. Izuku spends a few moments digging his phone out of his pocket: he's still hesitant to drag his notebook habit back into his life, his father's violent lessons sticking like molasses to his brain. But the phone has none of those connotations— he can take notes on it, and his mind is quiet when his fingers move across the screen.

“Yes! I'm ready!”

Eijirou grins and focuses, a soft calm falling over him and then there's tension coating his arms for a split second— before Izuku watches the skin in front of *ripple* . When it passes, he sees the skin has gained the texture of something like a jagged rock face.

“C-can I touch your skin?” He murmurs after a long moment of staring, a little in awe of how cool Eijirou's quirk is. One hand is already poised above his friend's lower arm, the other tapping distractedly on the phone's touchscreen by memory.

The dark haired teenager grins, moving his arms like he clearly wants to gesture but the movement is aborted halfway. “For sure dude! Just be careful, the edges get sharp sometimes!”

The skin that meets Izuku's fingertips *feels* like rock just as much as it appears— warm, almost too warm. It feels like the texture of the rocky sea walls, warmed by the midday sun and it's an oddly pleasant sensation. Eijirou has a warm personality and it's interesting to think that maybe his quirk reflects that too.

He traces a light finger across one of the sharper edges,

“It’s hard, like a rock! I know you said it was hardening but I somehow didn’t think of it as actual rock like hardening but I guess that makes sense! So obviously you got the hardening part of Himari-san’s quirk, but did you inherit just the ability to channel it across your entire body?” Izuku pauses, lapsing into a brief mental tangent.

“Shiho-san’s quirk is that she has no pain response on the outer layers of her skin, right?”

Eijirou is just blinking at him, seemingly overwhelmed by the tide of sheer *noise* tumbling out of Izuku's mouth but manages a distracted nod regardless. Izuku just takes it in stride, well and truly enamoured in a world of his own.

“So, did you inherit the pain-block aspect of her quirk or just the ability to channel it across all your skin surfaces? Can you only do it on outer skin surfaces? What about your mouth or tongue l?”

Izuku ends up needing to haul a larger gulp of air deep into his lungs at that point, head dizzy from neglecting to breath properly for a minute or so. Eijirou takes the moment to gape, jaw lax and open. When he finally regains his composure, he flushes but grins widely.

“Dude, that was so many questions and I honestly don’t know how to answer half of them but I can try my best! Your mind works wicked quick, Izuku, it would be super manly if you could like... help heroes like that!”

Eijirou is so inherently upfront and enthusiastically *honest* about his feelings, that Izuku sometimes finds himself overwhelmed. Eijirou *means* the things he says, with no mockery or mincing his words.

It’s refreshing and bright and—

Eijirou might be onto something.

It's definitely a thought that requires deep, concentrated thought and Izuku very carefully files it away for later inspection. For the moment, he has a quirk to investigate and a lot of questions to ask— a little slower this time.

“M-maybe! So— do you feel pain on your skin when you have this activated?”

Eijirou hums and with a noise like a cement mixer grinding gravel into paste, smacks his fists together. There's almost a flash of sparks as he does so, and Izuku hums as his fingers absentmindedly jot down a note about Eijirou's quirk form potentially having a flint-like property.

“I don't know, maybe? It's kinda hard to describe how pain feels when you're made of rocks I guess. I know that I've activated it when I've fallen before and still bruised my ribs beneath it, which *definitely* hurt.” Eijirou grins good-naturedly, and gestures to the small scar on his eyelid. “I definitely feel pain in areas I'm not hardening, even when my quirk is working elsewhere. So I'm not sure? It doesn't hurt to hit things with my hands when I've got Hardening switched on?”

Izuku hums, tapping a fingernail on his phone screen. “Speaking of activating it: is it a conscious thing for the most part? Does it automatically switch on when you fall over or get hit?”

Eijirou rests his arms against his chest, skin smooth and soft once again, clearly thinking hard. “Sometimes, it feels like it does. It's usually a conscious action, like... pressing a switch and having to keep your finger on the button to keep it 'on', and the longer I keep down

the button the less effort it takes.”

Izuku nods a few times, a shallow movement that’s just a continuation of his thought pattern. “So it’s a conscious activation, but becomes a muscle memory of sorts. Does it become more jagged at all?”

Eijirou shakes his head. “Not right now. I know Ma can make hers very sharp, but it takes a lot more concentration to hold that. I eventually want to work on that too.”

“That would make sense, it probably works on the other subdermal layers being activated with more effort and experience.” Izuku hums, glancing down at his notes and then balking at the sight of the time in the top corner of his screen, face pale.

“E-Eijirou! It’s almost seven am— we’re both meant to be at the kitchen by seven thirty!”

The dark haired teenager glances down to his own and grimaces. “Man, I didn’t realise we took that much time with this! We need to book it back, come on!”

They collect their sport towels and water bottles in record time, setting off at a brisk pace in the direction of the Kirishima household. It’s a testament to two months of hard work and dedication, that Izuku manages to at least keep pace with his fit friend as they run.

It’s been two and a half months with the shelter now, and Izuku hasn’t ever realised how little he had done with his life before this year. The thought of returning back to that life— locked in four walls, day in and out, having no one— it makes something heavy and fearful curl tight around his heart.

He casts the idea from his thoughts, banishes it from the chambers of his heart: this is his life *now*.

Izuku wants to live this life forever.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

***Best friend (Toshi)***

***MI: Kabocha had the kittens!***

***IMG description: an orange tabby cat is lying in a nest of white towels, and there's four small newborn kittens nursing.***

***MI : Nao-sensei took her in permanently— he wants us to help name the kittens, said that we kept Kabocha alive so it's our call!***

...

...

***GIF description: an animated character crying with heart eyes.***

***BF: holy crap. i can't believe i'm not there. did she handle it okay?***



...

**BF:** look at how sweet that little grey one is. i just wanna cuddle them ;-;

**BF:** we should get ejirou to name one too.

**MI:** That's a great idea Toshi! ㄅ( ㄟ )ㄱ

**BF:** which one is the loudest?

**MI:** The little mini tabby!

**BF:** bags calling that one mic.

**MI:** ahsjsjsj TOSHI!

**BF:** what

**MI:** that's so rude !!

**BF:** pffft mic would do it himself

**BF:** you know im right

**MI:** ...

**MI :** *I hate that I do know you're right...*

...

...

...

...

**BF:** *okay its a little painful watching you obviously type out the same message multiple times. just ask*

...

...

...

**MI:** *You're actually okay, right?*

**MI:** *I keep dreaming that you're not, and that you're still back there.*

...

...

**BF:** *i promise im safe and okay. we're both safe and okay.*

*IMG description: Hitoshi is sitting in what looks like a window seat, eyes lit up purple and gold in the sunlight. There's the tip of a cat's tail in the edge of the photo, fluffy and gray. Hitoshi is smiling, kind and close-lipped. There's a book balanced against his knees. It's taken selfie style.*

**BF:** *see?*

Izuku leans his damp forehead against his forescreen and wishes, not for the first time, that Hitoshi were here. He didn't know he could miss someone like this— it's not like missing Bakugou, missing a chance at a life he had craved.

This is like missing breathing, missing air on his skin.

He's just out of the shower, scrambling to get ready for his kitchen shift, but he always has time for Hitoshi.

**MI:** *I see, thank you Hitoshi. You're always ready to help*

...

...

...

...

*BF: anything for you, Izuku*

With a groan, he buries his face into his towel and fights the urge to scream into it.

Why did it have to be Hitoshi? Why is it the only person Izuku will never risk losing? There's a horde of butterflies loose in his stomach, a flutter along his nerves— Izuku's hand is cold and it is *empty*—

Izuku didn't realise falling in love could hurt.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

In the short while Izuku's grown to know the Kirishima family, it's stressed to him exactly how much of life he has missed out on prior to this point.

He vaguely remembers days spent at the Bakugou household, running with Kacc- *Bakugou* : it feels like a fever dream, hazy and indistinct.

But spending time at the Kirishima house?

It makes him feel *alive*.

Their house is a narrow, two story townhouse a twenty minute walk from Izuku's apartment building. It's not flashy, but it's a home: comfortable, practical and warm. it reminds Izuku fondly of the family that lives in it. It's pleasant to visit— and Izuku's first real brush with the concept of a sleepover has been here.

He spends a significant amount of time here, revelling in the freedom of being allowed to be *free* . The Kirishima household feels like a second home— somewhere Izuku feels just as loved, just as accepted.

He firmly ignores the section of his mind that is breaking down, stuck in a loop of second guessing and what ifs and *why can he not remember kind words about quirklessness—*

Shaking his head rapidly, he throws the thought out of his mind and refocuses on the sound of knocking on the door to the bathroom.”Hey, Izuku? You okay bro?” Eijirou calls through the bathroom door. “We gotta head out soon if we don't wanna be late!”

Izuku scrubs at his damp hair and straightens his shirt. His face is pale in the reflection of the mirror, white beneath his freckles— he's white beneath his tan and he looks like a mess.

He attempts to smile at his reflection and instantly winces at the trembling mess of lips and teeth that greets him. Yeah, he thinks to himself. Maybe no toothy smiles today.

His curving half smile in the mirror is shaky but passes muster, so he pulls it across his face and hopes it stays natural. If he smiles enough, maybe his brain will finally get the memo and sink into genuine happiness today.

He opens the door to find Eijirou with a fist still raised to knock once again. “I-I’m done!”

Eijirou grins. “Yeah dude, I can see! Good thing, we really *do* gotta go! Ma packed you some food for lunch!”

Izuku accepts the carefully wrapped bento box with a warm feeling in his chest and clutches it tight. “S-she didn’t have to do that!”

Eijirou just waves a hand casually, already moving down the corridor. “It’s fine, dude. She *likes* cooking, so she finds any excuse she can!”

By the time they reach the entryway of the house, their conversation has drawn the attention of one of Izuku’s favourite parts of the Kirishima household.

Namely, Eijirou’s little sister. His quirkless, godless little sister.

Izuku has always wondered, with equal amounts of fear and longing, what it would be like to have a sibling, someone younger than him to protect.

And with the cheerful bundle of Kirishima Hinata, Izuku realises he would’ve *loved* it.

She’s playing in the living room adjacent to the entryway when they pass through, dancing along to a cartoon showing on the television. The four year old catches sight of them as they pull their shoes on, bouncing over with wild dark curly hair and bright laughter.

“Ei, Ei! Can I come? *Please?* ”

Eijirou grins down at his little sister, ruffling a hand through the mess of hair on her head. “Not today, Hi-chan! Izuku and I have to go for a shift at the kitchen, and you’re staying with Ma today!”

The young girl pouts at that, turning her puppy-eyed gaze to Izuku—she’s well aware he’s the weakest of weak links when it comes to her. “Izu?”

She sounds so plaintive and Izuku sends up a prayer for strength, and immediately knows he will get no reprieve. “Sorry, Hinata-chan. But,” he smiles, knowing he’s way too damn soft. “How about we ask your m-mother to go to the park after Eijirou and I finish at the kitchen?”

The offer instantly sends the girl into an excited tizzy, as she chatters on and on about what they can do at the park later. Hinata is practically vibrating in place as Izuku ties his laces and goes to head out the door.

“You promise?”

Izuku grins, feeling genuine adoration for the girl. “I promise, Hinata-chan. We’ll s-see you later!”

Eijirou grins as he shrugs the door behind them, breathing in the cool air. “You’re such a sucker, Izubro!”

Izuku just grins in response, heart just a little lighter. “Gods, I know!! Your sister is j-just too *cute* Eijirou! She’s like a puppy, how am I meant to say *no?* ”

Eijirou shakes his head, laughter building in his chest as they turn out onto the street. “She’s more like a shark.”

Izuku hums.

“She can find the weakest link!”

Izuku just laughs at that, shaking his head as they walk. “They call baby sharks puppies too, s-so I wasn’t wrong!”

Eijirou just laughs harder and Izuku basks in the warmth of both the sun and his exuberant friend.

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The kitchen shift ends around one pm, and Izuku wants to plead exhaustion— Takahashi had badgered him into yet another sparring session after he finished his shift, and they find themselves sitting out under the midday sun in the courtyard.

But Eijirou laughs on the sidelines, watches carefully how Takahashi shows Izuku how to twist someone’s wrist, where to press and pinch— and when Izuku finally gets the wooden knife to clatter to the concrete, he grins. He’s flushed and sweating, almost exhausted: while Takahashi is grinning wildly at him, pride evident on his face.

Eijirou cheers at the sidelines, and watches as they run through the motion several times more and Izuku feels it begin to sink into his



muscles, his body memorising the pattern of movement until it begins to stick.

“Yo, Izuku! You’ve *gotta* teach me that one day!” Eijirou is practically vibrating on the spot as Izuku wipes himself down, grimacing at the feeling of cooling sweat across his skin. He’s taken huge leaps in his fitness, spending time with Takahashi and Eijirou, but he definitely has room for improvement.

Nevertheless, he grins brightly in response. “S-sure! How about after school on Monday? I’d say this afternoon at the park but, uh...” Izuku holds up one trembling arm and blushes. “I think I’m way too exhausted for that today.”

Eijirou just shakes his head, his smile sharp and wide as he passes Izuku a water bottle. “Dude, no worries! We can do that on Monday, it’s our running day after all and it’ll be a nice break. Are you ready to head back to mine?”

Izuku takes a long gulp of water and then breathes out a long exhale into the warm midday air. “Yeah, just lemme grab my bag.”

It’s a simple matter of grabbing his bag from where it rests against the wall of the shelter courtyard, and slipping his shoes on without undoing the laces. It takes a complicated second of wiggling to get them to sit properly on his feet but when they do, he jumps up and turns to Eijirou. “Ready when you are!”

The walk back towards the Kirishima house is almost familiar— they cross past the cat cafe and they stop to wave to Shiho through the large front window— Hojicha is basking in the sun there, and Izuku grins at the mound of white hair fluffing around him on the benches. He snaps a quick photo for Hitoshi, and they continue on.

It's still early afternoon by the time they get back to Eijirou's, and Izuku takes a quick moment to change out of his now sweaty clothing. A quick spray of deodorant and a wet wipe across his arms soothes away the feeling of dried sweat on his skin. It's not entirely pleasant—but the soft muted, *satisfied* burn of progress in his muscles is.

Hinata is almost shaking with excitement as he and Eijirou descend the staircase, Himari trying to get the four year old to sit still long enough to pull her unruly hair into something vaguely resembling neat. That ends up being two rough piggy tails, tied up with missed loops of her curls. It's messy— but it's also adorable.

Himari grins at him knowingly from the chair she sits in, tightening the hair bands. “Ei-chan is right you know: you're *definitely* the weakest link.”

Izuku flushes, pressing his hands to his cheeks. “I’ve n-never really been around little kids and I think I always wanted a little sibling but —“

He cuts off, biting his tongue and hopes his silence tells that story for him.

Eijirou rescues him from that awkward gap of tense silence with a slightly forced chuckle. “Trust me, you *don't*. She's only nice for you!”

Almost as if to prove his point, the dark haired girl pokes her tongue out at him and Eijirou points dramatically. “See! What did I tell you, she's a *hellion* ! She's just pretending!”

Izuku just blinks down at the small four year old sending wide pink-

brown puppy eyes up at him, and deadpans at Eijirou. “I h-have no clue what you’re talking about.”

He can’t hold the carefully blank face for long and the first twitch of his mouth leads him to burst out in laughter. Eijirou puts up a valiant effort, but eventually joins him in almost painful laughter.

Hinata eventually puts an end to it, pouting as she drags her brother towards the door, clearly impatient. “Eiiiiiii!”

“Coming!” He drawls out, clearly putting on a great show of reluctance as his sister waits for them to pull their shoes on once more.

It’s odd how quickly he has begun to *fit* here. It feels just as welcoming and safe as his own home— a year ago, Izuku barely had one home.

And now he finds it in his own home, with the Kirishima’s, with *Hitoshi* —

Izuku is still surprised to find *home* wherever he turns.

The walk to the park is both a simple affair and highly entertaining. Hinata, it turns out, has a very selective somewhat-eidetic memory— just for bug facts it would seem.

“Hey, hey! Izuuuu! Didya know there’s an ant and they’re really big and they blow up when other bugs try to eat them!! They just go *kablooie* !” Hinata’s arms swing out wide in a huge arc, almost taking

out Izuku's eye with bitten down nails as she does so.

Izuku recoils at the thought of ants that explode, or ants in general but does his level best to contain his fearful shudder. Izuku's fine with bugs— just not *ants*.

“Th-that’s really cool Hinata-chan!” He’s saved from more bug facts as they finally arrive at the park, the curly haired girl instantly dashing towards the swing set with that single minded focus only young children can really pull off.

Izuku and Eijirou end up sprawled beneath a nearby tree— the other teenager pulls their bento out from his bag and Izuku could have promised his undying devotion to him at the moment, suddenly realising how *hungry* he was. “God, Eijirou, I could eat your mum’s cooking *forever I swear ...*”

He’s sure Eijirou replies to it, says something witty and funny—

But there’s red eyes glaring at him across the park, and Izuku wonders whether Hinata had jinxed with her facts about explosive ants.

There’s very little time to think about that, as Izuku gulps down his fear and wonders if he can use his boon to fade from existence forever.

Across the park, Bakugou Katsuki narrows his eyes and Izuku feels his entire life pooling down the drain.

Chapter End Notes

Also I hope y'all know that if you bookmark this fic with funny tags and comments I read every single one because I love them so much and they give me \*life\*

# crux i

## Chapter Notes

I love y'all, I promise, I really do

(Mild emeto warning)

Reminder that there is unlikely to be a chapter next week. We'll see? I'm real tired y'all

Thank you to my wonderful friends [CalicoLynx](#) and RoadWild for the read throughs and betaing!

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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## PREVIOUSLY

*Izuku and Eijirou end up sprawled beneath a nearby tree— the other teenager pulls their bento out from his bag and Izuku could have promised his undying devotion to him at the moment, suddenly realising how hungry he was. “God, Eijirou, I could eat your mum’s cooking forever ...”*

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*Across the park, Bakugou Katsuki narrows his eyes and Izuku feels his entire life pooling down the drain.*

## Ch 15

For one long second, Izuku is sure he is going to self-combust.

He'd read, as a little kid, that people could just catch fire, out of the blue. It had terrified him: still *does* terrify him, the thought of flames emanating from his skin and burning him down to his bones.

Spontaneous combustion, as a method of death, is probably the lowest on his list of potential days— somewhere far, far below the second lowest of 'Midoriya Hisashi'. Both methods are almost identical: but Izuku would rather die to the flames of his father than any that came from himself.

Bakugou Katsuki's eyes are vivid, furious red across the park: they freeze Izuku in place, pinned like a deer in the headlights of a semi-trailer. And just like that deer, Izuku knows all that will remain of him is roadkill and a car wreck.

"Izuku!" His vision is suddenly taken up by dark hair, soft rust-red eyes and Izuku shakily breathes in for what feels like the first time in decades.

Eijirou has one hand clamped down on Izuku's shoulder, grip tight and mouth twisted in a worried slant. From the tone of his voice, he presumes his friend has been trying to get his attention for sometime, obviously concerned when Izuku hadn't answered him. Even now that he has been dragged back into the present, he feels like he is a spectator to his own body and the air moving in his lungs feels hundreds of miles away.

He nods, like a puppet, the movement jerky and uncoordinated. He doesn't know what to do, when he knows somewhere across the park is the only other person Izuku has learned to fear. He wants to smile, to reassure Eijirou that he is okay, to tell *himself* that he is okay but his face will not obey him. He is trapped in a frozen form, locked into place: and his shaky nod hasn't reassured Eijirou at all, seemingly the opposite.

"Izuku, can... can you hear me, dude?" Eijirou's face is still taking up Izuku's entire vision, and he wants to be relieved, and wants to be filled with a sense of safety now that he can't see Bakugou: but he can't *see him*. He can't track the blond with careful eyes, has no idea where he is, and the premonition of danger is lighting up his bones like lightning.

He tries his best to nod, feeling his hands begin to tremble almost uncontrollably in his lap despite his best efforts to keep them still. Slowly, the cold wave of panic that had washed over him begins to recede, Izuku anchored down by the warm weight of a hand on his shoulder. It leaves him shaking, shuddering even in the warmth of the afternoon.

"Izuku? What's wrong?"

Izuku hadn't realised he had shut his eyes until Eijirou's voice draws the world back into focus— he squints against the bright sunlight and his eyes water with the strain. Eijirou isn't as close as he was before, balanced back on the balls of his feet in a low crouch, but his gaze is still intently focused on Izuku.

It almost feels like too much attention, but it isn't, just enough concern to not overwhelm him and instead he leans into the hand on his shoulder. Touch hasn't always been a thing he's loved— but with every person he learns to trust, he finds more and more that he *craves*



it.

He draws the deepest breath he can manage, then sends it cold and shuddering into his lungs: when it comes back up his voice follows it, dull and shaky. “Bakugou.”

Something shutters across Eijirou’s eyes for a long, dark second: it’s not something Izuku sees often on his friend’s countenance, but anger is lining every line on his forehead.

It’s not that Izuku avoided talking about it: he’s building friendships based on trust and when they ask, Izuku does his best to tell the truth. Sometimes the memories hurt too much to tell, and he can’t bring himself to drag them into the daylight.

Bakugou had not been one of those truths.

When Eijirou had seen the pale white starburst of a long faded burn on his shoulder during one of their training exercises, Izuku had readily offered the story.

Maybe in another world, a different life, Izuku would’ve buried those truths and never brought them into light until he was forced. *Kacchan* would’ve remained a praise upon his lips and he would force himself to bury that trauma deep, deep down.

But Izuku doesn’t *want* to hide that.

So Eijirou’s dark eyes are dark and angry, and for a teen who spends his life smiling, the sharp slide of teeth behind his lips is a jarring change. “That’s him, across the park? The blond?”

Izuku licks his dry lips, nodding and when he opens his mouth to answer, sucks in a lungful of air that tastes like sugar and ash.

“Oi, Deku. Where the *hell* have you been?”

Bakugou has a way of speaking that makes his brain start to trip over itself immediately. It’s not the same terror as his father elicits, but a fear that chases his mind back into the dark recesses where his father’s voice waits for him. They’re not entirely separate— Bakugou’s words sound like *his* words and Izuku has never found a way to differentiate the two.

Izuku shudders through another deep breath, breathes out carbon dioxide tinged with that empty, gasping space of *nothingness* where Izuku knows nitrogen and oxygen and water vapour form after an explosion. He knows Bakugou is still yelling— but somehow, Izuku feels like it’s not at him.

Izuku steadies himself, looks up at Bakugou for the first time in months, and blinks when he can’t see him from behind the silhouette of Eijirou’s back against the sky.

“—call him whatever *fuck I want, asshole* ! The hell d’ya think you are, it ain’t your business!”

Standing in front of him, Izuku can practically picture the set of Eijirou’s mouth right now. It’s that same hard slant, like the morning they had turned up to the shelter to find the windows shattered, the seats ripped up. The way Shiho smiles—

Like a predator, all teeth and no lips.

“It is my business, *pal*,” and Izuku has no clue how Eijirou manages to pour vitriol into what is usually a friendly term from the dark haired teen. But he spits it, like it feels dirty on his teeth. “That’s my friend, and I *really* don’t think he’s appreciating you being here right now.”

There’s a continent wide span of silence and then Izuku can finally see Bakugou as he attempts to side step Eijirou.

It feels...

It feels like a let down, if Izuku is perfectly honest with himself.

He’s still blond, still wild-haired and eyes like gems in the sunlight—he still looks like those well-buried daydreams Izuku pretends he never had. Bakugou Katsuki was an asshole, unrepentantly so, a bully, a cruel person: but he’s also the first boy Izuku ever looked at and wondered what lips would taste like.

It’s not what he thinks now— there’s too much beyond those sun-drenched, halcyonic summers: Bakugou is a boy taught to be cruel and he has taken to it like a duck to water.

Maybe it’s the fact that Izuku hasn’t felt the flash of heat in his skin for months, or maybe it’s the fact that Eijirou stands between them like a shield and Izuku *knows* he is safe. What he had said to Eijirou that morning is true— he is the perfect shield. Whatever it is, Izuku doesn’t feel fear or anxiety: his mind is clear and his chest burns with a familiar, unwelcome heat.

Izuku will take what he can get right now, Loki's Influence be damned. "Hello, B-Bakugou."

"*What* did you call me?"

"Your name."

Bakugou's face contorts for a long second, almost a snarl if not for how wide his eyes are in that moment of time.

"You know that's not what I mean, nerd. Where the hell did you and Auntie go? The old hag has been going off about it for months and she is convinced I know where you went!"

Izuku must have left his self preservation somewhere back at Kirishima's front door, because he snaps back before he can even register what's coming out of his mouth. "Do you even look at the news, Bakugou? The w-whole damned *city* knows where we went!"

The familiar crackle of explosions sound in the park and the air disappears from Izuku's lungs like it had never been there in the first place. There is no liquid courage that can counteract the fear of heat and burning and skin bubbling beneath palms lit orange and a mouth lined in flames.

Izuku has memories of this heat: they are but embers of the fire that he can feel emanating from Bakugou. It thrusts him back into memories of sugar-smoke in school corridors and burns on top of half healed burns.

He's sure Bakugou is still talking, his mouth twisting and snapping: he

can hear nothing except the crackle of nitroglycerin bursting into furious, ephemeral, horrific heat.

“Deku!”

That accursed moniker filters into his mind, grabs a hold of that tiny child somewhere in Izuku’s chest who will only ever be *Deku* and squeezes tight. And the child in Izuku’s mind is his ultimate defence, his greatest weakness, his worst asset: it will save him but who knows what he will wreck in the process.

There are words pouring out of Bakugou’s mouth, words pouring out Eijirou’s mouth, words pouring out of his mouth and there is too much *noise*—

And suddenly his words stop.

Izuku takes one panicked breath of sugar-sweet air and heaves, emptying his stomach out in a disgusting catharsis: directly across Bakugou’s feet.

“What the *FU*—“

Izuku does not stay to find out what cruelty follows those words: he bolts, goes from sitting to running in an instinctive motion born from necessity, born out of running from the boy in front of him and Izuku leaves him far behind.

The sensation of his feet hitting the ground is jarring: he has left his shoes behind in the park, nestled neatly next to Eijirou's in the shade of the trees and—

*Eijirou.*

Izuku has left Eijirou behind, left him there with Bakugou, left *Hinata* there but Izuku cannot go *back*.

He knows he's standing in the middle of the sidewalk, barefoot and heaving for breath— the taste of bile is thick in his mouth and he imagines he smells it too. There's no one else in the side street and Izuku is immensely grateful for that fact.

He sinks against the wall of a nearby underpass and takes a deep breath in, holds it shuddering in his lungs like a trapped bird. His heart beats frantically against chest, a dying dove in between muscles and sinew and blood: the air is clear, tinged with gasoline fumes and the smell of rubbish bins in the alleyways.

He can practically taste the foul miasma of rotting food on his tongue, but the lack of burning sweetness makes it the greatest breath of air he has taken all day. He peers into the dimness of the underpass and somehow...

Somehow—

The scent of rotting is stronger.

And something moves in the darkness: yellow eyed glow like lanterns

in the gloom. Izuku doesn't have time to breathe before the taste of sewage and waste and bilious fluid washes over his mouth and Izuku *drowns*.

Izuku has always placed drowning pretty high on his list of 'ways to die'. He's read that it's considered the easiest, quickest, kindest way to go— like drifting into sleep, letting one's self drift down and forever into some blue deep. It reminds him, distantly, of whale fall— the inexorable sinking of a whale carcass to the depths of the seabed, the home of thousands of creatures. Izuku wonders what his body will be home to, whether he finally falls into the depths.

Whoever had said these things has never drowned before.

Izuku cannot think past the terror washing through his veins, the wretched desire to *live* that burns like a tattoo, his heart drumming out the age old elegy of *let me live* , *please let me live*. He claws at the liquid in his mouth, swamping his face— he sucks in chunks of viscous matter when he tries desperately to inhale, wants to cough them up but there is no room in his throat.

He is drowning slowly in the liquid filling his lungs and there is no give to the form taking over his body, no texture to the oily liquid that he can grasp onto and pry it away from his face.

In a startlingly vivid moment of clarity, Izuku realises he is going to die.

There is no fighting this villain— and it is a villain, cooing desperate, dangerous words in his ear and Izuku wants to *live* .

He has too much to do, too much to live for, he will never answers, he will never see Eijirou, and Hitoshi will never *know* —

Hitoshi will never know.

It's that thought that catches on his absent breath, grits against his bones like gravel against his skin and he *rages* . He bites down desperately on the viscous form beneath his teeth and claws with useless fingers because there is a knife in his pockets but he cannot *reach* and he *hopes* —

“It’s all right now, young man.”

There’s a voice, echoing through the underpass: Izuku wonders if he’s finally run out of oxygen, hallucinations swimming in front of his eyes.

“I am here.”

Suddenly, Izuku is not alone in the alleyway and there is cold, clear, crisp air filling his lungs. He heaves air into his lungs, holds it there like he never has before, like it is a treasured aspect of his body. He will never again take for granted the sensation of air filling lungs. The wind howls past his ears, ringing with the cacophony of a Texas Smash.

“Are you okay, my boy? I apologise for getting you caught up in my villain fights!

And holy crap, All Might is standing before him laughing and Izuku cannot breathe past his panic, and for the second time that day: he heaves a pathetic pool of bile over someone’s shoes.



Immediately, he's scrambling back and coughing on the taste of vomit because he's just thrown up on his idol in life and that's just *peachy* .

He doesn't know whether it's the oxygen deprivation or the hysteria, but the urge to laugh is boiling up his throat.

The tall, dramatic figure All Might cuts against the light of the street behind him shakes as the hero laughs, ignoring the vomit on his shoe in favour of scooping the goopy form of the villain into a conveniently close drink bottle. Izuku shudders as the sight of rolling white eyes and gelatinous green slime pressed up against the thin plastic of the bottle.

“If you are okay, I will take my leave! I am counting on your continued support!”

Izuku is halfway through a shuddering shake of his head because he *isn't okay*, when the hero nods hastily in return and with a dramatic goodbye, gears up to jump skyward.

And Izuku, continuing his trend of pure *idiocy* his day has taken on, grabs a hold of the hero and is yanked, screaming, into the robin's egg blue of the sky.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

They land somewhere in the city— the number one hero he has been clinging to has cleared half a city block in a single, powerful leap and Izuku can feel his teeth rattling in his skull from the force. It takes all his strength, every minute fragment of his concentration to stay

attached in the flow of wind against his body. He's distantly terrified about losing his phone— it feels like a silly worry, high above the city but his only link to Hitoshi is that phone.

Izuku sinks to the concrete with legs that can barely hold his weight the moment he feels solid ground beneath him. He strains to keep his footing, but the ground comes up to meet him as he falls backwards.

“That was extremely irresponsible, young man! I understand your fanaticism but you could've been hurt!” All Might admonishes him, Izuku barely keeping up in a haze of too little oxygen and pure disbelief. This is his *hero* : the man Izuku has idolised for years, kept his hope alight in the deepest of his despair.

This is the hero who has guarded the last remnants of his dreams with tenacious fury: because anyone can be a hero, All Might had *said so* .

That was a truth not even Midoriya Hisashi could quash, a hope no one could snuff out.

And now...

Now Izuku can *know* .

“P-please, I have so many *questions*—“

“Young man, I have to go.”

“Please, just tell me: c-can I be a hero, even without a quirk, even

without a patron?”

It feels like heresy, to ask it so hastily but it rushes out of his mouth before he can hold it back, hanging in the air like smoke.

The hero pauses— then shudders in place, like something deep in his chest is shaking to pieces. All Might cursed, low and vicious— *pained* . He’s coughing, ragged and wet, into his fist and Izuku starts forward, hand reaching out like there’s something he can do to help.

“S-sir, A-All Might? Sir are you—“

He’s cut off by a rush of wind and steam and displaced air, obscuring his vision for a long stagnant moment. When the haze clears away, Izuku is left staring at the shell of a man.

The gaunt blond man coughs again into his hand, lowers a red-stained palm away from his mouth and stares at Izuku with eyes that seemingly shine bright blue in the sunken hollows of his eyes. The man is a hair's breadth from a skeleton, like everything about him has been burned away from inside and after a long moment, Izuku realises that’s probably the truth.

“Wh-what...”

The man sighs, mouth red and Izuku has flickers of memories of his mother with red lips and teeth red behind a forced smile: their eyes are equally as sad. “I am All Might, young man.”

Izuku blinks, nonplussed even in the depths of his shock. “W-well, yes? But h-how are you...?” He hesitates and then gestures shakily to

the thin man before him.

“Like this?” There’s a bitterly humorous note to the hero’s voice as he replies, like he has asked himself the same question day in and day out. The gaunt man sinks down against the fence of the building’s safety railing, exhaustion plain on his face. “Now that you’ve seen me like this, you might as well stay and find out why. But let me be clear, young man: this cannot get out, you cannot tell anyone. Do you understand?”

Izuku nods, voice sticking somewhere deep in his throat and he breathes around the weight of expectation in those piercing eyes.

Then All Might lifts the edge of the now baggy white shirt he is wearing— and Izuku sucks a quick, horrified breath through his teeth at the scar that takes up half of All Might’s torso.

“This is from a villain I fought, five years ago. I lost half of my lungs, and I have no stomach left. There were surgeries, to mitigate the damage but...” the blond gestures to the thin state of his body. “Such procedures have their own drawbacks and I became emaciated over time. Turns out, it’s hard to keep your weight stable when you’re missing a stomach.”

The chuckle the hero lets out could hardly be called that: it’s bitter and sad, and Izuku could almost drown in the self-loathing filling it. “Right now, the All Might you know and trust can only work for three hours a day.”

Izuku wonders why he feels betrayal low in his stomach: Izuku feels some measure of his trust in the hero that has kept him hopeful for years slipping and it feels petty, to consider.

But Izuku wonders whether All Might could've saved him, if he hadn't been like this.

"F-five years ago? There's no w-way Toxic Chainsaw did t-that!"

The hero sitting across from him smiles, bloody and bitter. "You've got a good memory, kid." He sighs, sinking further back against the railing and eyes fixed on the semi-skeletal form of his hand in front of his face. "No, it wasn't him. The fight that did this, I asked to be removed from public record and from the media because the Symbol of Peace must never falter, or be daunted when confronted with evil."

Izuku gapes, mind struggling to find the pieces that match. "Then..."

"You understand, don't you, young man? That the public can never know about this: I'm the hero who saves with a smile and dissuades villains merely by my presence. To know this.." the hero trails off, face grim.

Izuku swallows, heavy past the boulders settled in his throat. "They wouldn't feel safe."

All Might nods, gaze intense on his face. "Then you understand, why I cannot just simply say 'you can be a hero' when evil that challenges me exists—dreams are fine to entertain, young man but we all must learn to be realistic."

\*Realistic.\*

Izuku feels numb, caught between anger and despair.

“Even if you had a quirk... our patrons make us who we are, young man. Without one, how could the public trust you? No, my boy.”

And it chills Izuku to his bones, cuts him to the quick: he is cut open to the air, exposed to the world and there is no stopping the exsanguination of his dreams out onto the concrete.

He watches as the hero clambers to his feet, unsteady and with a pained noise. He cannot think past the fog, the numbness crowding his skull, even as All Might fixes him with a deep stare.

“If you wish to help people, find another way. The hero’s path is not for the quirkless, so find another dream.”

Izuku doesn’t know what makes him say it, or why it comes straight from his bones hollow with fury and anger. Only that one moment he is numb, and the next he is filled with an anger that fills every empty space in his lungs with searing heat. “How dare you?”

The words aren’t his but the voice, the feeling, the *fury* : it’s all his.

The hero balks, half hidden in the shade of the fence . “Excuse me?”

Izuku can’t restrain his tongue, and doesn't *want* to bite back the words spilling up and out of his throat. He’s ten minutes out of almost dying and Izuku feels like he can be excused for being a little out of sorts, with his hero breaking his dreams in front of him. “I mean, how *dare* you? Why is it,” he pauses, voice cracking when he cannot hold the furious tears any longer. “—that everyone who is supposed to care, *doesn’t*? You’ve always said a-anybody could be a hero!”

“I didn’t mean—“

“Didn’t mean *what*? That kids like me counted, that we *mattered* ? No,” Izuku smiles, voice vitriolic and cold. “Of course you meant that.”

Izuku wants to think that he’s being impolite, that he’s yelling at the number one hero on a rooftop in a city ward he doesn’t recognise. But as he jabs one accusative finger in the pro’s direction, he thinks none of these things. “I can’t believe I e-ever *trusted you!* ”

Anger is never the friend of children in bad homes. It was a lesson Izuku has drilled into his bones, woven into his skin with thread pulled tight so that he can never forget that anger isn’t an emotion he’s allowed to have.

But the thread does not hold forever, and in a single moment, Izuku finds his anger is a ready weapon in his hand.

Anger is never a friend to children locked in bad homes— but it is a weapon in the hands of the children who escape to take their lives back.

All Might says nothing, mouth wide and eyes glinting with something Izuku could call horror or pain or pity, if he could summon up the energy to *care* .

“Young man, I never—“

“Fuck you.”

Far below them. Izuku watches a blast of flame and dust light up the shadows of a neighbouring street. He's never been one to ignore his instincts: even when he's fairly sure there's godly tang to the gold-green heat that surges through his mind.

Something deep in his mind whispers, rumbles in his bones:

*Go* , it tells him.

All Might forgotten, Izuku obeys: turns and bolts to the door of the rooftop. He skitters down the steps— takes two, three at a time in his haste and barely keeps his feet underneath him. He's still barefoot—the cold damp of the service stairwell feels oily on the soles of his feet but he doesn't have time to think of how disgusting it feels.

He brushes past tenants in the lobby with muttered apologies, and dashes out of the building into a street crowded with pedestrians and hovering in the air is the fear-inducing scent of burning, burnt, blackened sugar. He wants to run *away* .

But the right thing is to run towards, to run towards the sound of desperation.

And when Izuku breaks through the crowd, to the barrier erected by heroes: Izuku wonders if the gods truly got off on handing him truly ironic situations.

Because Bakugou is hanging in the familiar grip of a green, viscous monstrosity and his eyes—



His eyes are wide and begging, desperate for oxygen and safety and *freedom*. Izuku can still taste it on his tongue, the realisation that death was moments away and he would never see the next day.

Izuku remembers drowning, and without even thinking of his body or his mind or the fact that his feet are bare on the concrete and *All Might had told him to give up and why can't I let this go—*

He finds his feet moving before he can stop himself, fingers digging into the very bottom of his cargo pockets— and he seizes shaking fingers around the wooden practice knife he had been desperate to reach earlier.

It's such a simple thing, to jump with every muscle screaming in his legs and in a burst of movement, Izuku does what he does best: improvises.

He feels the sickening squelch of the villain's eye beneath the dull knife and fights not to vomit at the sensation of something warm and fluid leaking across the hand still gripping the handle. He doesn't know what he's doing, just that the familiar fear in those eyes is something that will haunt him if he doesn't nothing.

So he claws at the green slime, drags jagged nails futilely across the slippery skin of the villain and wonders how the hell he is supposed to fix this. Maybe they are all right: his father and his mother and his heroes and his teachers and his classmates and All Might:

Maybe Izuku can never be a hero.

It's a realisation that coincides with a rush of air, a cry of Texas Smash

and Izuku wonders, deep in the back of his mind, whether the heroes around them would've just watched as Bakugou died. A child was *dying* in front of them and they dithered, unsure of what to do, bound by protocol and training and legalities: all while a boy drowned, suffocated, spent what could've been the last moments of his life in terror.

It's why, when Death Arms storms over to him with a furious expression, Izuku doesn't apologise.

"You! You could've been killed! Why would you even think of interfering with this?" The Pro Hero glares down at him and it makes Izuku want to flinch away, to cower beneath it but he refuses. Izuku respects heroes— but he refuses to respect a man who just watched a child suffocate and did *nothing*.

It isn't *right*.

"W-well, I was thinking that since nobody else w-was going to help the *clearly dying teenager*, it was up to me!"

Death Arms scowls, mouth tight and angry. "That was incredibly rash. It's not your responsibility to do these things!"

Izuku clenches his teeth tightly, feels something hot and foreign crawling up his throat: he lets it out, like water boiling over on the stove. "No, it's *yours* and you did *shit* all!"

Izuku doesn't stick around to hear the pro's reply: he's keenly aware of the crowd around them, the way there are cameras on the scene— the way that red, furious eyes stare at him from across the street. Bakugou is recalcitrant in the hands of the paramedics, not violent but he's certainly loud enough to have them wary of his actions.

So Izuku uses his small stature to his advantage and slips away into the crowd: he's not a distinctive face, and he manages to blend in almost immediately. Caked in slime and smelling like an open sewer, Izuku trudges away from the scene with a mind full of fury and the startlingly vivid clarity of adrenaline coursing through his mind.

Heroes were bound by legalities, by rankings, by bureaucracy, by the trappings of the system that keeps them employed. It keeps them safe, legally— but it makes them inefficient, unable to adapt.

So with the lightning quick thought process of burnt-off adrenaline, Izuku realises he can never be a hero but it doesn't mean he can't *help* .

..✧□□□□□ □ ◡ □□□□□ ✧..

Izuku stumbles through his doorway, filthy and cold: his clothes are ruined, the stench of sewage locked into them. He wants a shower, a change of clothes, to ask his mother whether she really thinks he can *do this*—

The walls of the living room are *red* .

## Chapter End Notes

Reminder that there is unlikely to be a chapter next week. We'll see? I'm real tired y'all

# crux ii

## Chapter Summary

In which Izuku learns what it is to be alone.

## Chapter Notes

So uhrrrr that thing I said, about taking a hiatus?

It turns out I am completely incapable of not writing so y'all still a chapter this week yay! Also... you should uhrrrrrr check the tags ;-;

If you came from a tiktok video rec, link me?? I got told there was one and I wanna say thank you to them!

WARNING: this chapter is gore heavy, it is body horror heavy! It has a mild emeto warning.

Also a note: I use Hakamada Tsunagu as the last name because it's canonically listed as the correct form. Do with this info what you will.

Thank you to my wonderful friends [CalicoLynx](#) and RoadWild for the read throughs and betaing!

[Discord](#) [Twitter](#)  
[Tumblr](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku stumbles through his doorway, filthy and cold: his clothes are ruined, the stench of sewage locked into them. He wants a shower, a change of clothes, to ask his mother whether she really thinks he can *do this*—

The walls of the living room are *red* .

It's not like Izuku hasn't had nightmares of this moment.

He spent just shy of a decade under the thumb of a man who cared nothing for his mother, *less than nothing* for Izuku. Midoriya Hisashi had been a tyrant in their home, a giant in their walls— it was inevitable that Izuku would have feared for his mother.

He had spent entire school days on the edge of his seat, fear worming its way under his skin, searching for an out from the confinement of his skin. Izuku is fair game in their home— but if his father comes back, his mother is alone and Izuku cannot protect her.

He knows, if he told an adult, that they would tell him that it's not his job to protect his mother. That in this situation, when they are both victims: that she is his mother and she is meant to protect *him*.

But the truth hovers, somewhere in the back of his mind, like a phantom in the wings of the stage curtains: that Izuku isn't the victim, he's the *cause* .

It was his quirklessness, his godlessness, his *uselessness* that had brought on the ire of his father and Izuku will never forget that.

There's something about triumphing over an evil, banishing a fear, about how they have finally managed to erase the constant terror from their lives that somehow makes the sight before Izuku's eyes all the worse.

The apartment is wrecked, the kitchen a mess— it looks like an localised storm has swept through and left all that they have in disarray. There are chairs torn to pieces in odd patterns that make no sense outside of a quirk.

And the walls are *red* .

It's not like Izuku's never seen blood splatter before: but this... this is different.

Gore drips from the wall and it reeks like a butcher's shop, the scent of blood and meat and offal rising in the air like rot. There is viscera covering the walls and the couches that are the staging ground for every goddamn *upheaval* and the television and—

There, in the middle of the destructive spiral, is his mother.

Or what is left of her.

Izuku's seen blood before but never this much, he's never seen a mortal wound: only dreamed of them in fever-bright haze, pictured them in anxious bouts as he sprinted home after school. The vicious terror of what if he is *too late*—

And Izuku is too late.

He stumbles, legs numb and mind empty and eyes hollow, through the crime scene of his home, falling to his knees beside his mother like a puppet with its strings cut.

She is still breathing: Izuku can see her lungs, open to the air and pulsing pink, wet, round with whatever air she is forcing through them. Her eyes are open, red and there is a starburst chain of broken blood vessels in the wide white expanse of her gaze. Izuku wonders why everything has to come back to starbursts.

He opens a dry mouth for words that will not come, hands scrambling to find somewhere to *touch* but everything is red, mutilated beyond recognition: Izuku cannot touch her because *everywhere* is an open wound. An endless, looping spiral: viscera winds around the half-shattered frames of her ribs, bones warped and cracked. ..

There is almost nothing left of the woman who has raised, loved him, fed him, sheltered him: she is one part whole and nine parts *obliterated*.

There is no safe harbour left in her arms, torn asunder by whatever sacrilegious fury has burnt through their home— her shoulders are a mass of ruined flesh, bone shining white through the blood and Izuku isn't sure she would be able to raise them if she tried.

“Ka...”

“M-mum!”

His mother coughs on the sound, one hand scrabbling weakly at the edge of his knees and Izuku latches on it, desperately trying not to heave at the sensation of slick, warm blood smearing across his hands. It's soaking into his pants, creeping up through the fabric like capillaries: he's sitting in a pool of blood large enough that Izuku knows there is no quirk or miracle that can fix this.

“Izuku...” She sighs out the sound, barely enunciated but Izuku has heard it every day of his life, and he would recognise it in any shape or form. “Y-you...”

“I-I...I’m *here* , oh gods please *no...*” Izuku chokes on the words, sticking to the sides of his throat like glass. His mother stares up at him, pale grey lips thin in that soft almost-smile and she is *smiling* .

“M-my Izu... r...” A shiver passes through her body, what should be a full body motion that peters out somewhere near the ruined half of her body.

He’s crying, he thinks. There’s a burning sensation carving its way through his eyes, hollowing out the ducts: tears tracking acid-hot paths down his cheeks and dripping off his nose. His mother blinks once, twice, at the sensation of moisture on her skin and that shudder passes through her body again, her face screwed up in a ricture of pain.

There’s a hollow sensation in his gut, at the pale grey that takes up her lips.

Izuku has never seen his mother without lipstick on, never once in his memories— ever that soft pale pink, smiling wide. In every photo, every memory: Izuku will only ever be able to think of the rejected god mark that colour has hidden his entire life. “M-mum...”

“R-run.”

It’s only a single word, almost too quiet to hear but it sends ice creeping up his back. How can he run? How can he *run*?



“..have t-to.”

He must've spoken out loud, because his mother replies and Izuku doesn't want these to be his last memories of his mother. He wants to remember the night before: the scent of crumbed pork, the way she laughed when Izuku told her a silly pun and the resulting pun war that had led them crashing into their couch, apartment ringing with the sound of their laughter.

Izuku doesn't want to remember this instead, crouched in that same apartment, and the deathly stillness of death encroaching in the dusk shadows. But Izuku knows—

This will be his last memory, and it will never fade.

“I... I *can't*. Y-you can't a-ask me to *leave you*. ” He won't do it, he *won't*. This is the woman who raised him, who has loved him from the very moment he had taken breath in this world and he will not let her take her last without returning that kindness.

“Oh, baby... y-you *need* to run... he..” Her voice fades off into a deep, hacking cough that sprays blood like a mist through the air. Izuku feels it spatter across his cheeks, a bastardised mimicry of freckles.

*He.*

“W-who did this? Mum, what is going on, please j-just tell me!”  
There's something hot rising up through his chest: hysteria bubbles behind the gates of his teeth like gasoline, cloying and sick.

There's something absent in the way she looks up at him—something

is missing: she looks at him like she doesn't know who he is. And Izuku, face smeared with blood and tears— not even Izuku knows who he is at this moment.

“Hisashi... made a deal—” She’s gasping, like there’s no air in her lungs and Izuku can see the still red forms of her lungs, motionless and stagnant. She struggles for breath because there is no air left. “Quirkless... needed *quirkless* ...”

There’s something about the way that the word flows over her lips that pulls Izuku in closer, as he presses his face into her palm: it is filthy with blood, with viscera and bile and the sweet-sick scent of ruptured organs. Nevertheless, Izuku presses it to his cheek, holds it there: and hiccups, sobs into it like he can memorise the way it feels to be *loved* .

“Love you...”

“Pl-Please *no* , I don’t— I can’t *do this* , mum please you can’t *go!* ” He wants to clutch at the last vestiges of her life: he can see it slipping away, like light from her eyes.

Midoriya Inko dies in between one moment and the next, the last air spilling from grey tinted lips: and with it comes a name.

*Overhaul.*

And the realisation dawns on him, in the same way one watches a tide sweep towards the shore, unavoidable : Izuku is alone, with a name he doesn’t recognise and clothes soaked red with blood growing cold.

Izuku is *alone* .

But he cannot stay.

His mother is laid before him, broken and empty and *dead* — he needs to vomit, to yell, to cry and sob and *scream* because his mother is dead! There should be something significant happening: someone should know something is dramatically, irrefutably *wrong* with the world.

Outside the windows of their living room, the world moves on much like it had minutes ago. Cars fill the air with the sound of tyres bumping over uneven asphalt, the thrum of engines a well-remembered backdrop. There's chatter and clinking of crockery from the apartment above them, the drag of wooden chairs pulled out from a table.

All around him, the world continues on while his—

Izuku's world is shattering into mosaics, into pieces of tile: a picture of the world before this and the world *now*, a world irrevocably changed. A world without Midoriya Inko.

This place, this house: it isn't his childhood home. It's not the place he grew up in, where he took his first steps and lit incense with his father, smoke coiling like dragons in the air. These walls don't bear the dents of fists in the drywall, or marks burnt into the doorways. This home is the place where Izuku learned how to breathe and cry and laugh: this is the place Izuku has learned how to *live* .

Izuku cannot stay.

This place was once a place for him to live— now, it can only be the place where Midoriya Inko died.

His mother had begged him to run, with the last of the air she had left in her lungs and Izuku will not make her last words to him a waste of breath.

The world outside is quiet— and Izuku remembers, with the same inexplicable pull of the moon on the rising tides, that there was meant to be *someone* watching the unit. An officer, a hero— *somebody* was meant to be here and yet his mother lies dead on the floor on their watch. Izuku thinks back to that morning months ago, watching a hero who promises to keep them *safe*, when Izuku had encouraged his mother to agree.

When Izuku had given someone a *second chance* and they had spiralled his life into a train wreck, just moments after he had finally gotten back on the tracks.

Izuku knows he's meant to go to an authority at this point, should dial the emergency number with shaky hands and leave bloody fingerprints on his phone screen in haste. He's meant to go the police, the neighbours, to a *hero*—

Izuku thinks he's had enough of heroes.

Anger is not something Izuku has ever allowed to rule him, not in any real sense. Anger was a bitter-hot, *dangerous* thing to feel: his father had been an angry, spiteful man and had used that to instil terror, to entrap his *loved* ones in a prison masquerading as a home. Izuku still thinks of anger as something that hurts.

So when he feels it rising in his throat, prickling at his eyes with hot

tears, he doesn't fight it. If anger is meant to harm and to hurt, then anger is what Izuku needs.

He feels it like something sickly in his mind, some dark corner he has neglected for too long outgrowing its barriers and it spreads, quickly. Anger sweeps through his thoughts, a wildfire on a grassy plain, bone dry in the hazy summer: it obliterates all thoughts except the simple, brutal facts.

They had failed to protect her.

'They' encompasses a lot of people. The police, who are meant to be *here*, the neighbours who should've heard *something*, and the hero who had promised them *safety* — and Izuku, who had failed in every way a son could fail their parent.

'Well,' some treacherous corner of his mind whispers. *'Look at where trusting them has gotten you.'*

And Izuku does look.

He thinks about heroes who never saved him: about a fraud of a hero, gaunt and sickly on a rooftop. He remembers the words of a man meant to foster his hope, his dreams— thinks of the way All Might had taken the bare ashes of his dream and crushed them, scattered them into the wind with no regard to their importance.

The longer Izuku looks, the deeper he thinks— the more Izuku realises that he doesn't *trust* them.

Maybe he never has.

(Bakugou Katsuki wants to be a hero and maybe... just maybe, he's going to fit *right* in.)

The fact of the matter is that Izuku cannot stay here. His mother... no. That's not his mother, not anymore. It's the shell of who she was, some broken facsimile of a woman who smiled at Izuku in the mornings and who had held him tight through the upheaval of their lives.

His mother exists only as a memory of lips dyed red and a plea for him to flee, so Izuku cannot stay.

But for a long moment, Izuku cannot stand. His arms are a deadweight by his sides and his legs have gone numb, refusing to move even when he knows they should be. He needs to flee: but his hands are still clutching his mother's hand, fallen limp in his grasp. He doesn't want to let go because letting go now means letting go forever.

Izuku had been prepared for one path of forever— a lifetime with his friends, of learning to live and grow and *love*. Izuku wants to taste that freedom again, the lingering salt and sea wind, the smell of coffee and cat fur— he wants *forever* .

Now, there is only the indelible, unavoidable truth: his mother is dead and gone and will be buried without him there, because she told him to run. And if there is one thing Midoriya Izuku has always done in life: he has always listened to his mother.

So he stumbles his way to standing, numb and cold: his jeans *creak* as dried blood stiff against the material cracks and breaks with the movement. Bile spills into the hollow of his mouth, but he spits it out: highlighter-yellow and acidic in the dying light of the sunset outside.

Izuku doesn't want to remember this room, this place— he wants to *forget* .

But Izuku doesn't have the luxury of amnesia, and they say that revenge is the next best thing when justice isn't an option. So he stares and he memorises: he burns the shape of his mother's rejected godmark into his memories, the way her hair spreads out like a fan on the floor behind her head, the mess someone has made of her. He burns these things into the soft, grey matter of his brain and alongside it, the name she had murmured, her last words. *Overhaul*.

Izuku doesn't have the luxury of forgetting: and if he cannot forget, then he will damn well *remember* .

The last light of a day where he was loved is dying outside, the sky tinged with the purple hush of dusk and the last hues of a blood red sunset. The sun sets on a world where Izuku is whole: he doesn't know where he will be tomorrow, or the next tomorrow after that.

Izuku just knows that he takes one last look at the body of his mother and shuts her eyes with fingers that tremble. He leaves red, sticky lines of blood when he drags his fingers and he shudders at it, drawing his hands away.

And in the final bitter notes of the dying day, Midoriya Izuku turns and flees the broken shell of his home, disappearing out onto the darkened city streets.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Shinsou Hitoshi hasn't really ever considered a world where he lives

in safety to be a world that could be true.

It's dangerous to dream of things you can have taken away from you, and safety was one of those things. Safety, acceptance, love: these were things people could use against you, *would* use against you if given the chance. He knows these things: he's memorised them the same way people memorise psalms and prayers, with the wholehearted realisation that these things were of the utmost importance. That they were *life saving*.

So living with Hakamada Tsunagu has been... an experience.

The day he arrived at the man's home, Hitoshi had taken one look at the hero and instantly distrusted him. Best Jeanist is a man who looks like he tears people apart verbally because he *can*, eyeing Hitoshi like he can see the seams to mend, the threads to pull that will make Hitoshi fall into pieces.

Hakamada looks like he will find the right loose thread and send Hitoshi tumbling into the vast unknown of emotional vulnerability that he only really trusts Izuku with.

And that... Hitoshi isn't really ready to poke at the mass of emotions surrounding his sudden upheaval. He thinks, in some sick twist of irony, that he finally understands why Izuku had joked about the couch in his living room. Hitoshi had sat there and watched his life turn upside down before his eyes, all while sitting on that damned grey lounge.

For the first few days, Hitoshi doesn't venture out of his room unless absolutely necessary or his presence is requested. Hakamada has spoken only once at length— when he had first arrived, the pro had explained his schedule, his contact numbers, the emergency information for the building and: that had been it. No lectures, no



rules outside of common sense, no *threats*.

He wasn't entirely sure what he had expected from the house of a pro hero— something grand, *huge* .

But Hakamada's unit is small, and comfortably furnished: nothing flashy but solid wood, meant to last in simple stylish elegance. Somehow, despite Best Jeanist's flamboyant persona: Hitoshi thinks the unit suits him. It's simple, effective and comfortably lived in. There's coffee cups throughout the unit, a sliding stack of what look to be fashion magazines losing a fight to gravity next to the armchair in the living room: in an aching flash, it reminds Hitoshi of the Midoriya's household.

And there is a cat.

Hitoshi wants to be aloof, distant and withdrawn— but the damn cat pulls him away every time. Kochi is a mountain of fur and fluff who is seemingly insistent on worming his way into every aspect of Hitoshi's existence in the house. And it works because his weakness is cats, has *always* been cats.

So he holds out for three days and then he can't, because Kochi is endlessly soft and warm, willing to lay across his lap all day. It's a comforting weight, just enough pressure to remind Hitoshi he is not alone: it keeps him anchored.

He doesn't really see Hakamada outside of meal times, and on rare occasions, Hitoshi sees the man in the lounge room. He feels like he's impinging in some way on the man's access to his home— Hakamada's lounge room is well used, and Hitoshi doesn't like the thought that he is keeping the pro from his own favoured spaces.

Which leads him here, clutching to Kochi like a comfort blanket in his arms and the echo of a knock on the office door. It's been Hakamada's main space since he arrived: Hitoshi can't help but feel guilty for being the reason he is in there.

The door opens after a long moment of rustling papers, revealing Hakamada framed by the backlight of his desk lamp. He peers down at Hitoshi, face soft and uncovered. Hitoshi thinks it's oddly interesting to see a hero like Best Jeanist outside of his public sphere: in the sanctity and privacy of his home, the fabric hero is slightly less than perfectly put together.

There's a hair or three out of place across his fringe as he smiles, soft and disarming. Hitoshi doesn't trust that smile, but he's here for a reason. "Shinsou-kun, good evening. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Hitoshi sighs inwardly, trying to mull the words over in his mind before he decides on what to say. He doesn't really want to talk—he hasn't said anything that wasn't absolutely necessary in days, but he feels like this is important.

He doesn't implicitly trust that Hakamada has his best interests at heart, because that's not a concept his brain will acknowledge. Trust isn't instant, it is *slow*. Heroes are meant to help: but they haven't before this and Hitoshi *can't* forget that.

It's petty, unfair and illogical to blame Hakamada for the failures of other heroes—Hitoshi is well aware of this fact. Best Jeanist hasn't failed him, hasn't ignored him, is *helping* him now: but ever still, he belongs to a system of authority that has consistently failed him and so many others, over and over again.

Hakamada may be a good hero—but whether he is a good *person*

remains to be seen.

“I... you can use your lounge room, y’know.” He doesn’t mean for the words to come out as cold as they do, but it doesn’t seem to phase Hakamada as he blinks down at him, nonplussed.

“I had assumed you would appreciate the space without me in it, for the beginning at least.” Hakamada shifts his weight against the doorframe, and Hitoshi watches every movement of it like a hawk. This man is a hero: but Hitoshi doesn’t *know* him.

“It doesn’t really matter. It’s your house, sir.” A little too late, Hitoshi remembers Hakamada had specifically requested not to be called that and shuts his eyes tight. He hasn’t seen him angry yet— and he doesn’t want to.

There’s a drawn out silence that follows, where Hitoshi wonders what he is waiting for. Logically, Hitoshi knows his reaction is unfounded: this is a pro hero, the number four, a man both Present Mic and *the* Eraserhead trust with his care. He should be able to trust him— but Hitoshi has been trained to expect violence. It’s the language he’s been raised with, and he speaks it better than any other tongue he knows.

When the silence becomes unbearable, Hitoshi cannot keep his eyes shut any longer and he peeks up through his lashes at Hakamada. His guardian is pale, staring down at him like he’s seen some fragment of a memory and doesn’t like what it shows him. He looks, for lack of a better word, *sad* .

“You...” Hakamada looks down, pinching at the bridge of his nose with his free hand and sighing. “It’s okay, Shinsou-kun. I’m not going to harm you, no matter what you’ve been led to believe is the norm in regards to your care in the past. You don’t need to fear violence in this house.”

Hitoshi can feel the dull ache of his ribs, still a kaleidoscope of bruised-plum, navy blue and sickly chartreuse yellow— he’s not about to trust Hakamada off of his words alone. “No offence, Hakamada-san, but I’ll believe that when I see it.”

Hakamada nods, like he had already expected something along those lines and rests his free hand on his hip. “That’s understandable. I don’t expect you to *trust* me, Shinsou-kun: I don’t expect anything from you.”

Hitoshi knows he came to the office for a reason but it’s slipping away from, lost in the sudden burst of derisive anger. “You don’t *expect anything* ? Look,” he sighs, arms pulling Kochi tighter against his chest. The cat responds with a soft purr, soothing something instinctive that bristles in the back of his mind. “You can’t *not* expect things. You’re an adult, a hero— you expect *something*. Don’t lie to me.”

Hakamada echoes his sigh, gaze sliding up toward the ceiling and shutting for a brief moment. When he returns his gaze to Hitoshi, his green eyes are sharp and focused in a way that reminds him of the way Izuku narrows in before he tears some broken aspect of Hitoshi’s life into pieces.

“You’re right. I do expect something.”

Hitoshi nods, both fearful and *relieved*. Expectations are things he knows how to live with— if he knows what Hakamada wants from him, he knows what he has to do to remain safe. Expectations became a checklist of safe emotions and actions: once Hitoshi knows what he’s expected to *be* , the sooner he can become that.

“I expect,” Hakamada begins, voice softer than Hitoshi has heard it yet. “That you will heal, in this house. I expect that you do your utmost to recover, to recognise that your childhood was *wrong*, that the people who hurt you were *wrong*. I don’t expect you to trust *me* : I expect that you use this place as somewhere safe, to learn how to *be* safe. Because—“

Hakamada takes one fast, audible breath here: like he needs to stop before he says something too much. “Because you don’t know what it is to be *safe*, Shinsou-kun.”

Something about the tone of his voice: it’s probably meant to be comforting, soothing. All Hitoshi can hear is *pity* and the inferno rages up through his throat once again, something gold and vicious buried alongside it. Hitoshi is once again reminded of the way Loki has spoken, to the casual disregard for the lives they have lived— so he ignores that molten hot anger of his patron and lets his own bubble to the surface.

“All offence meant, *fuck your pity*. I’m not a charity case because someone decided I was the most convenient punching bag, I’m not here to heal— I’m here because I have to be, because it’s the best option and I don’t want to hear the bullshit about ‘*finding family*’ and ‘*working past my trauma*’ ! You’re a hero but you don’t know a single thing about saving kids like me, because nobody gives a damn!” Hitoshi can’t move his arms lest he drops Kochi but he wants to gesture, to jab accusative fingers at the hero in front of him.

He settles for a smile that barely qualifies, bared teeth. “So go use *your* lounge room and stop expecting me to break down because you enter the same damn room as me.”

Hitoshi is certain Hakamada means to continue the conversation but he doesn’t give him the chance, turning on his heel and rushing down the hallway. He flees then, to the safety of his bedroom that locks from the inside and turns the lock as soon as it shuts behind him.

He knows, logically, that if anyone really wanted to get in, they would: it would be nothing against a pro hero. But the illusion of safety it offers him is addictive, a soothing balm to his adrenaline fueled anger as he sinks to the floor with his back against the door.

He didn't mean to get angry, not like that. But the feeling like someone wanted to *fix* him, like there was something wrong with him just because of how he had been raised, *dragged up* through his childhood: it trips over a wire strung low in his chest. A tripwire that leads to a cache of close to a decade's worth of repressed anger, ready to explode outwards at the slightest of pressure and Hakamada has unknowingly, unwittingly barrelled into it, full steam ahead.

Hitoshi feels like lightning trapped inside a glass sphere: one wrong move, one shake too many and he will burst into pieces, with no way to put himself back together.

So he sinks back against the door and buries his face in Kochi's fur, breathing in the familiar smell of dander and letting it soothe him. It's the best he has, in the absence of the person who knows how to keep him stable.

..✧□□□□□ □ □□□□□✧..

It turns out, it's a lot harder to keep anger at someone burning when you live with them and they haven't *actually* done anything wrong.

Hakamada joins him at the breakfast table the next morning, quietly: he doesn't bring up their argument, does nothing except place one plate of scrambled eggs and toast in front of him. Kochi basks in the morning sun through the windows, and the background hum of the

morning news fills the empty space left between them.

And for days, this is their routine. Hakamada cooks, Hitoshi tidies up and they live two separate lives in the same space. Until a day where Hitoshi finds himself gravitating towards his guardian. The house is quiet and empty in the hours Hakamada spends on patrol— he doesn't want to admit it, but Hitoshi misses the conversations he had with Izuku. With the Kirishima family, with the staff at the cat cafe: he misses *people* .

So sue him, if he starts to find the company of his guardian halfway pleasant. He starts joining Hakamada in the living room, working at his online schooling on opposite ends of the couch while his Hakamada fills out mission and case paperwork. It fills their interactions with a quiet, safe quality— the longer Hitoshi spends in that, the less anger he feels.

And Hitoshi is angry because Hakamada is *right*. Hitoshi doesn't know what it's like to be safe in a home, outside of what Izuku and Inko had taught him. He remembers the barest hints of his mother's kindness but his childhood has been shaped by fear, pain and isolation— Hitoshi has no healthy reference points for establishing his life after living with the Masamura family.

It's late in the evening, probably close to fortnight of living with Hakamada Tsunagu, that Hitoshi finds himself apologising. "I'm sorry for what I said before... I know you were right."

Across the room, Hakamada lowers the sheaf of papers away from his face and blinks, the light from the living room lamp glinting off of his glasses. "About what, Shinsou-kun?"

Hitoshi grimaces, settling one hand into Kochi's thick fur where she is pressed against his thigh. "About... about my childhood. And what I'm

meant to be doing here.”

With a sudden look of understanding, Hakamada slides his reading glasses down off his nose and folds them carefully in his lap. “I had wondered when you would bring our... argument up. I hadn’t wanted to push, since it seemed clear that you were overwhelmed at the time.”

Hitoshi curls his fingers through Kochi’s fur, the texture of the smooth strands helping him focus his thoughts down to the current moment. “I was. I don’t understand how healthy homes work, you were right.”

Hakamada smiles, something soft: Hitoshi’s gut instinct says that the expression is pitying but he holds fast, ignores that instinct and waits. The smile is kind, patient, *empathetic* : there’s not a drop of pity, and Hitoshi wonders why he had ever thought there was.

“It’s I who should be sorry, Shinsou-kun. Do you understand why?”

Hitoshi doesn’t know, so he shakes his head.

Hakamada sighs, and slides his paperwork off to one side, leaning forward and bracing against his knees. “I am the adult in this household, and for all intents and purposes: I am your guardian. I am meant to make you feel safe in this space. I failed at that, I pushed at topics I knew would be upsetting for you and that was wrong of me. Will you accept my apology?”

Hitoshi blinks. “You... you’re apologising for upsetting me? Why, it’s not like you’ve hit me or done anything that actually hurt me?”



“Shinsou-kun, you’ve spent two weeks avoiding me and the spaces I’m in. You had come to my door to offer an olive branch of sorts, and I didn’t allow you a space to do so. You *deserve* an apology for that.”

Hitoshi stares, wide eyed, at Hakamada across the lounge room. He’s not smiling but neither is he frowning, just intent on watching Hiroshi’s face and he feels *seen* . “I-“

He pauses and breathes, sinks back against the couch and listens to Kochi purr beside him. “I accept your apology, then. If you’ll accept mine for being a pain in the ass this week.”

With a soft laugh, Hakamada grins brightly and settles back against the couch as well. “I will. You were a little bit of a pain, yes.”

Hitoshi finds himself hesitantly returning the grin and thinks, for just a moment, that maybe he *can* meet Hakamada’s expectations.

Hitoshi wants to heal.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

The next morning, Hakamada hands a new phone to Hitoshi and with a firm reminder that he needs to be responsible with, tells him that Izuku has his number already.

He waits, half a day and when the phone buzzes, Hitoshi finds himself finally being able to connect back to the person who helped pull him out of the depths of his former life.

It feels right, to be able to talk to Izuku and finally thank him properly.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

It's the same phone in his hand now, lit up in the darkness of the early evening several months later. Hitoshi stares down at the message, filled with confusion and no small amount of trepidation.

**19:23**

***Midoriya Izuku***

*MI: Do you trust me, Hitoshi?*

It's an odd text and it throws him for a loop for several long moments. Finally, he hesitantly types back.

*SH: i do. Izuku, what's wrong*

...

*MI: If I asked you to meet me at the altar park, with no questions asked and with your go bag... would you?*

Hitoshi glances to the corner where he keeps the nondescript

backpack. He trusts this home— he trusts Tsunagu with his life and his recovery and wants to stay here because he feels safe.

But.... Izuku is the first person Hitoshi had ever trusted, ever *loved* and there is no choice.

*SH: yes.*

...

...

...

*MI: I need you to do that. Will you?*

Hitoshi takes a breath that feels like the end, like grief and sadness and *homesickness* : then he breathes out air that is empty of those things, and retrieves his go bag. It's still fully packed— everything important is in here. He grabs a warm jumper, spare shoes and some jeans and tucks them in the top section.

He should've unpacked this: he's finally growing comfortable in this home and maybe this could've *been* his forever. But Hitoshi is a foster kid, through and through.

He understands that there are no happy endings, no forevers.

The window shifts open easily, far too easily for the gravity of what Hitoshi is doing. The street lights outside reflect off glass— and Hitoshi sees the photo frame, next to his bed. It's the only photo he has of Hakamada and himself— taken while out shopping, Hitoshi clutching a sugary monstrosity of an iced coffee and Tsunagu's face takes up sixty percent of the picture.

It joins the clothing in his bag and with one long, longing glance around the place he wants to call home, Hitoshi slips out of the window and lands as quietly as possible on the adjacent tree branch. It shudders beneath his weight, but holds fast.

And in the dying light of the sunset, Hitoshi watches Hakamada in the kitchen. He's singing along to something on the radio, something bubbly and happy. He looks *happy*, and Hitoshi knows he will come soon to check on him, to call him for dinner.

*SH: im on my way.*

With a heart that aches with a muted grief, Hitoshi shimmies down the tree and disappears into the twilight-dark streets.

## Chapter End Notes

So y'all knew this was coming but I'm still so sorry ;-;

I hope you enjoyed your major whack of angst! And, we have so many little plot reveals in here! How many did you spot (:

If you came from a tiktok video rec, link me?? I got told there was one and I wanna say thank you to them!

[Discord](#) [Twitter](#)  
[Tumblr](#)

## crux iii

### Chapter Summary

Things move along.

### Chapter Notes

Thank you to my wonderful friends [CalicoLynx](#) and RoadWild for the read throughs and betaing!

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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### PREVIOUSLY

And in the dying light of the sunset, Hitoshi watches Hakamada in the kitchen. He's singing along to something on the radio, something bubbly and happy. He looks *happy*, and Hitoshi knows he will come soon to check on him, to call him for dinner.

*SH: im on my way.*

With a heart that aches with a muted grief, Hitoshi shimmies down the tree and disappears into the twilight-dark streets.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

The city smells like nighttime, gasoline and stale beer as Izuku moves through it, the sour staleness and drifting earthiness of cigarette smoke. It hangs in clouds, winding lazily from cigarettes held between nicotine-stained fingers. The smokers stand in pairs, or trios, outside bars and nightclubs— they watch him go by, silent and wary.

The blood is dried on his face, his shirt, and his jeans crinkle, stiff and heavy with it. Nobody stands in his way— it seems being covered in blood is a one way ticket to nobody fucking with you in this part of town. They watch him pass: he feels their eyes on his back until he leaves their sight.

The city comes alive. Izuku sees familiar faces among the stragglers outside bars, from the shelter: they stare, quiet and weighted with understanding. The night is early in winter, encroaching faster with every passing moment, and the air is growing cold without the sun to warm it.

His phone is silent in his pocket— the messages in it weigh heavily in his mind, the fear that Hitoshi will not come— he hopes he will, in some awful, selfish corner of his mind. Izuku doesn't want to be alone.

He is shivering, he realises, but he can't decide if it is from adrenaline or the chill.

Everywhere, he sees the whites of dying eyes and Izuku drags his gaze from shadow to inky shadow in the vain hope that he will not see them there. But he sees the shapes of her ruined hands in the angles of thin fingers and glowing cigarette butts on the street, the smell of a butcher shop that hangs across his shoulders.

Izuku reeks, and he cannot blame the people who stare.

It's these moments where it rains, in stories and movies. The heavens break open, some great widening chasm in the clouds above, sending water streaming down to the ground. Pedestrians will huddle under eaves, the smokers will press tight against the brick fronts of the bars and desperately protect their last pulls of poison smoke from the

deluge. It will light up the street— neon lights will catch the edges of water as it falls, reflecting in pink, red, and vibrant blue.

It will wash away the blood, wipe it from his face and Izuku will be rid of the last remnants of a nightmare.

But—

It does not rain.

The skies are clear, crystal cold and the air aches in his lungs when he breathes too deeply inward. There are no clouds, no cover— just a sky empty of the moon and the faint smattering of stars growing more numerous by the minute. It does not rain and Izuku stumbles on, filthy with blood and the smell of sewage. The day feels like an aeon ago, a vision of another life, but surely it cannot be *his* life. Izuku exists in this moment, and this moment only.

He cannot think past this moment. His mother lies in the past, and Izuku doesn't want to remember.

Slowly, the streets drift into lanes, lanes into beaten dirt — the pocket of wilderness on the edge of the city looms in the darkness. It should be intimidating, the mass of foliage all but indistinguishable in the same.

But Izuku knows his way here, even when he cannot bear to remember— his feet ferry him across the darkened ground and towards the path buried in the foliage. It's easier to trip over the uneven roots in the dark: Izuku finds himself stumbling, feet still bare. He wonders what Eijirou will do with his red shoes. It's a shame: they were Izuku's favourite pair, but maybe Eijirou will enjoy them.



It's not like Izuku can go back for them, after all.

He wanders along the path, and out along the crumbling carcass of the tree bridge. He remembers days spent here, suddenly: warm summers and soft days, when life was simple and happy and Izuku had a future, had his dreams.

But the tree bridge is broken, the creek is dry and Izuku doesn't want to dream anymore.

The altar shines white, even under the moonless sky: the ground is hot around the stone, the air is freezing. Something twists in the air, unseen but lightning-sharp within the eddies on the breeze: the air stinks, of ozone and stale blood and something like a spice Izuku only remembers from dreams.

The ground is dry, dust and dirt against his knees as he settles in front of it, breaths coming hot and deep in white clouds in front of his face. When he lays his hands on the stone, it burns hot beneath them and Izuku does not allow himself to flinch from it.

And in the shadows, a nothingness stirs — the nothingness becomes something, and something becomes the form of a man who shifts in his vision. Like looking out through a wall of water, the details are fuzzy, but Izuku knows he is looking at something more than mortal.

**“You returned, little mortal.”**

Izuku doesn't know what to reply with, how to form words and sentences out of the furious upheaval of his mind. Izuku doesn't know what he *wants* , why he is *here* . So he lets his mind open, pouring

freely between stiff lips.

“Make me your champion.”

Ever-shifting eyes grow wide, their irises a tangle of colours both natural, and beyond bizarre. Stretching across the hollow the stones rest, the god is larger than life; his skin shifts with something gold running beneath it, like sunlight reflecting off a snowbank or sparks as they flicker off a bonfire, dying and ephemeral in the night air. **“I do not have champions, little mortal. There has never been a house of Loki, nor a cult to my name — I am the god without function, just as *you* are a child without function.”**

It should hurt, to hear it put so callously— but when Izuku thinks of drowning in an alleyway, of Bakugou dying in increments before his eyes, of the way his mother begs him to *run*... Izuku cannot find it in his heart to be hurt. The god is not wrong: he is quirkless, godless, *functionless* .

But Izuku is still *someone* .

“ But you a-angered a god who *did* , who had the home and the cult and the *champion* — why?”

Loki peers at him, a terrible beauty in the lines of his face. **“Because when you live forever, the world means *nothing* . We are so indifferent to the world that we can no longer hold things in our hands— the enjoyment of our fruits is finite and time is endless.”**

Izuku peers through the moonless night, at the ghastly shadows that form across Loki’s face in the ominous glow of the altar. “So w-why won’t you take a champion?”

Loki laughs, a bitter sound. **“For what cause do I need a champion, what can they give me? They are but mortal, and my foes are all among the heavens.”**

Izuku holds his hands together, tight in his lap— his fingers are losing sensation from the stranglehold. But they cannot shake if he keeps them still. “Then if you have nothing, *no one* — anything I can give to you is *double what you already have* .”

Loki... smiles, catlike and curious. **“You are right, little mortal. But still, even if I deign to place my mark upon you— what would you do with my blessing? I do not want a champion who thinks paltry tricks and rescuing cats is what my favour is for.”**

Izuku glances at the blood, dry across his hands— it flakes off with every nervous turn of his hands. What will he do with this?

Power is a heady drug. It drives men to extremes, to glory and pain and monstrous acts of cruelty. It makes kings out of beggars, thieves out of priests, lions out of lambs — or a predator out of a doting father within the walls of his childhood home.

And Izuku knows that power will change him: but is he not already changed beyond renewal, too far gone to go back to who he was?

*No* , Izuku thinks. *I know exactly what I would do with power.*

“I will rid this city of the people who hurt me, who hunt others for sport. I will make your name a testament to my actions, I will drive it into the light and you will *never* be forgotten. And...”

Loki leans forward, teeth sharp now in the glow of the altar and they blur together— one second they are shark-like, the next they are the fangs of some monstrous snake. **“And?”**

Izuku grins in return— it is not a beautiful expression, too wide and full of teeth to be comforting. “I am going to murder the man who killed the only good part of my life and I will raise you, *drag you* into the stage of the world so that Amaterasu knows I will seek her out *next* .”

Loki smiles then, and his face... it pauses on the visage of a man who is so beautiful Izuku cannot breathe. **“A champion should see the face of his god, should he not?”**

Izuku gapes for a long moment, mind scrambling to catch up. Anger is keeping him running, adrenaline hot and heavy in his veins— Loki’s words sent a spiral of energy through his body. “I-“

**“Did you think I would not agree, little mortal?”**

Izuku can only nod in reply, shaky. He hadn’t really planned this, had never planned on asking, *demanding* this.

**“Will you, Midoriya Izuku, son of Midoriya Inko, lay your claim on a seat in the house of Loki?”**

Izuku takes a deep breath, hands reaching forward to lay against the hearth-hot stone of the altar. “I will lay my claim.”

An itch begins in his hands, a subtle thing, like the sensation of sun-hot metal against his bare skin. Regardless, Loki eyes him with ever curious eyes— green, sickly green in the light.

**“Will you, Midoriya Izuku, bear witness to the vows you have made to me?”**

Izuku flattens his hands against the altar, the itch becoming a burn against his nerves, flaring hot and leaving him reeling as it ebbs and flows in waves. “I will bear witness.”

The sensation of ice, cold beyond cold, mixed with magma working its way through his veins — it trails up his arms, white-hot pain that leaves coherent thought a half remembered dream. **“Will you, Midoriya Izuku, hold true to your promise of the glory you will bring my name?”**

Pain, unceasing pain grips his chest as the itch-burn- *inferno* travels the pathways of his nerves. It climbs across his chest, through and up past his neck and in the hollow of his cheekbone, flares silver and molten-gold. He has the breath to gasp out, halting and strained. “I will.”

Izuku watches the god bite down with sharp teeth on his thumb and he lunges forward— gold-veined hands clamp down on where Izuku’s meet the blindingly hot stone. His touch brings the winter into Izuku’s bones, the howl of some great beast in some forgotten world, the emptiness of a life led without purpose heavy in his gut. **“Then by my blood, this is our vow. Midoriya Izuku is the blood of my will, the conduit through which I enact my wishes. His boon is for his heart alone, and into his seat in my hall he may come and sit.”**

With hands larger than any Izuku has ever seen, the god wipes the golden-ichor of his veins across his cheeks. It flares hot and electric,

nothing to the pain burrowing into his bones. **“In this lies my mark, so that they will know him as *mine*.”**

And in a moment, Izuku feels golden heat twine its way through his bones, gouging out a space in his body— something hollow that aches with fullness.

Upon his cheek, along the lines of blood and ichor... a mark blooms, strident upon his skin. It doesn't burn, not like fire or heat— burn is just the closest word to what he feels, to what inscribes itself into his skin. The weight of his vows feel like anchors, like shackles around his wrists— like he has locked himself into something huge in magnitude, astronomical in scope.

Izuku thinks, belatedly, that he has made a mistake.

**“Perhaps you have, little champion— or perhaps *not*. As long as you hold up your end of your deal, well...”** Loki smiles, something horrible and monstrous in it— Izuku wonders if this is what millennia of being ignored and *useless* does to you. **“Let's hope we never get to that point.”**

Izuku shudders and steps back involuntarily, steps scuffing in dry dirt — he knows he's not far from the edge of the creek bank, but it hardly factors into his mindset. He wonders, in some absent part of his mind that isn't deriding him for not thinking about what he is *giving up*, how he manages to forget every time.

That gods weren't human, weren't mortal— they didn't think the same way humans did. Izuku had demanded a business transaction, a deal only a god could understand— and he has made a bad deal—

Izuku has only made offers— he has made no *demands* .

And from the look on Loki's face as he steps back into the shadows, face twisting once again in the fading altar light, Loki knows everything is in *his* favour.

**“We will see each other soon, chosen. You can *count* on that.”**

Izuku is left trembling in the cold air, cheek stinging and unnaturally cold where it pressed against his cheekbone. “That’s... what I’m afraid of, I think...”

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Hitoshi isn't really sure what to expect as he travels, really.

He doesn't need to know at this point, single mindedly focused on the intense need to get to his only friend. But... the thoughts cross his mind, from time to time, sitting on the evening train with a backpack that is almost the same age as the death of Hitoshi's hopes and dreams in life.

Maybe that's *slightly* dramatic — he had gotten it when he was leaving his third family, finally something to take his stuff in that hadn't been a heavy duty black trash bag. There is nothing so depressing as carting your life from place to place in something meant for rubbish.

He's no stranger to losing things, over and over. Hitoshi has lost security and trust and innocence and everything, every *one* who has

ever loved him. He knows what it feels like, sounds like— Hitoshi understands grief in a way he's not sure the people around him do. Or maybe, they understand it differently — they are allowed to hold on to their things, their people, to *mourn* . Hitoshi has never been allowed to mourn the things he has lost, and that in itself is a mourning unique to so few people in the world.

Hitoshi thinks, with a chill along his veins, that Izuku's messages ring with something mournful, even through texts.

Hitoshi has never hoped more than now, that he is wrong about something.

The train lands him in familiar waters, dark in the night. It must be close, Hitoshi thinks, to ten at night. The street lights flicker— and Hitoshi walks past the empty, shattered glass windows of the Masamura house. It looks cold, and broken in the harsh white light of the half dead street lights.

For three years, this had been the place he had lived, slept, ate when he was allowed: in the floorboards of the house are well worn patterns, memories of which segments sang under their weight. Hitoshi could trace them even now, in the dark and in the cold.

The Masamura house is a gutted frame of the horror of his childhood — he could go in there now. There is nothing to stop him: the door hangs on the hinges, cracked where the handle locks to the doorframe.

But Hitoshi glances at the ghost of his past, and walks on.

He has a *home* now, and he has no need of an unwanted past.



Hitoshi finds the altar park easier than he thought he would, if he's perfectly honest with himself. He had thought, in line with most of his previous experiences getting lost in the simplest of spaces, that he would have the same issues here.

But warmth tugs him down side streets, through dirt lanes— out into the wooded area Izuku had dragged him to, oh so many months ago. And... it really does feel like an age ago. When nobody knew any of it, two boys sharing rice balls on a rooftop and Izuku smiling like Hitoshi *meant* something.

So when Izuku asked him to leave behind what little happiness Hitoshi had found... Hitoshi had left it.

Hitoshi can't explain, doesn't have the *words* to explain this— he's positive borderline codependent is one of them: but Izuku is the first person since his mother died to look at him and see something *worth it* . Not for his quirk or his usefulness, just for the fact that Hitoshi existed. Inko had opened their doors to him, lifted him from a house where he lived in fear, and showed him care unlike any in his memory.

When Hitoshi sees Izuku, it's only the shape of his form in the darkness. He's sitting, curled up and still against the hillside — it's a vulnerable, open position. Hitoshi has never seen Izuku look like *this* : like something has torn away his defenses, left him open and wanting.

Hitoshi fumbles for his phone, flicking on the flashlight as he does so; he's not sure what he was expecting, but what he sees drives the breath from him.

There is blood, *everywhere* . Izuku is coated with it, hands so red Hitoshi cannot see the skin beneath. Clothing saturated, dyed black where the blood has congealed. Hitoshi has never, *ever* seen this much blood.

For a long moment, Hitoshi wonders if he is too late. Izuku is so *still* — for tenuous, aching seconds he waits for him to move, to shift. He waits for Izuku to *breathe*.

Just when Hitoshi thinks that maybe he's found the corpse of his best friend, Izuku blinks blearily at the light, chest shifting with breath and Hitoshi breathes out air tinged with building grief. "Izuku! A-are you hurt?"

Izuku stares up at him and beneath the grime, something gold and iridescent shines across his cheek— it catches the light of the flashlight, like something rippling across the plane of his cheek. Something that looks eerily like a claim mark, but unlike any Hitoshi has seen before.

When Izuku finally meets his gaze and shakes his head, Hitoshi flinches back.

Hitoshi doesn't think he's being poetic, or pining when he says Izuku's eyes are wonderful— he has *kind* ones, like Hitoshi thinks his mother had so long ago. And now Izuku stares back, flat and a little empty: Hitoshi tries to quell the thought that he is looking at a stranger, and is only half-successful.

"Hitoshi?" Izuku's voice is *wrecked*, rough as he stutters over Hitoshi's name. "You... you're here?"

There's a fragility to Izuku's voice, a vulnerability Hitoshi has never

heard from him, one step from collapse. Izuku is a house of cards, barely standing, and he hadn't thought Hitoshi would come. "I'm here, just..."

He doesn't know how to continue, what words best fit the dawning horror creeping up on him.

Izuku's hands tremble as he reaches for Hitoshi, winding his fingers into the softness of his jacket like he is making sure Hitoshi is *real*. It reminds him, suddenly, of Kotone, the youngest foster daughter of the Masamura family. Something that should be a tree, stretched out in the sun, *magnificent* — trampled down before it was allowed to grow.

*Downtrodden* is a word the poets use for victims, for people like Hitoshi and Kotone and Izuku— but it is not a kind word. The poets mean that they lie flattened to the ground, beaten *up*, beaten *down* — the bare shape of children left behind in the dirt, never meant to rise again. *Downtrodden* was just a kinder word for *forgotten*, for *unwanted*: and Hitoshi has never forgotten this.

"It's... it's not mine. I'm... I'm fine." Izuku forces out the words, like each one is a struggle to enunciate. Hitoshi can only relax into the relief, the assurance that Izuku is alive.

And Izuku is here, built from spun glass— Hitoshi wonders if Izuku has always been this translucent, seconds from cracking. So Hitoshi ignores the mark on his cheek, the blood caked on his clothes and his hands, and pulls Izuku closer in.

And for an age, an eon, Hitoshi holds Izuku close and lets him breathe, hot and quick with fear, against his chest. Until a thought springs to mind and with it, a frisson of fear descending his spine.

“Izuku... where is your mother?”

Izuku *flinches* back. Clumsily pulling from the circle of Hitoshi’s arms, he sits back against the slope and he laughs. It’s shrill and hysterical, like Izuku doesn’t know how he’s supposed to react, even as his laughter fades off into an eerie silence.

The chill becomes something more, some insidious and *knowing* along his spine. There is so much blood...“Izuku, is she...”

“Dead.” Izuku says, something hateful and cold in his voice.

Hitoshi chokes on a breath, frozen in his lungs. “W-what...”

“She’s d-dead and she—“ Izuku breaks off, hands white-knuckled on his knees. “She told me to run.”

Hitoshi feels like there are pieces falling into place, information that starts to make sense in his mind: it forms a picture he isn’t sure he really wants to look at. But Hitoshi doesn’t have the words to ask why there is so much *blood* , why Izuku looks like he’s seen a war in the space of a day—

“It’s...” What is Hitoshi meant to say? He can’t say it’s *okay* because it *isn’t* but there isn’t anything *else* to say. “It’s... okay. You.. *we* can work through this, right?”

“I don’t...I don’t think this is something we can work through...”

Izuku's eyes are wet in the dim light, and Hitoshi knows his own cheeks are hardly dry; tears stinging cold in the breeze. It feels wrong to mourn a woman he hardly knew, but Hitoshi had trusted Inko more than almost anyone he had ever met. She had wanted nothing from him, and given him everything she could, and now she is gone.

Nothing Hitoshi can ask is right, no words will come, so he remains silent as Izuku sinks against his side once more, heaving wet breaths into the space between them, and together... they mourn.

Eventually they end up lying side by side, eyes focused on the stars above them. The moonless night makes them stark against the night sky— Hitoshi can trace the shapes of the Beidou, the Hokkyou constellations, even the red glow of Mars on the horizon.

“My... she used to say that the stars were like my freckles. That I could draw lines between them, that I would always hold a star map on my skin... that I would always be able to find my way home.”

Izuku sighs, low: his eyes are still stuck on the sky above. Hitoshi wonders what he is thinking, behind the blood on his cheeks, the gold that glitters beneath it, and the exhaustion that fills every line of Izuku's body.

“What do I do when my star map doesn't *have* a home to lead me to anymore?”

Hitoshi stares at what he can see of Izuku's face at this angle, only the edges of his chin lined with torchlight. This moment feels detached from time, the altar clearing a world away from all that they know. If Hitoshi didn't know their stars from memory, he would think they had fallen into another world.

There's something shattering into pieces in the air, and Hitoshi thinks it might be hope.

"We build another one," Hitoshi finally says, as he winds their hands together. "We find a place and we build another home, one that they can't take away from us."

Izuku hums, and Hitoshi thinks it sounds empty.

..◆□□□□□ ◡ □□□□□◆..

Uchizumi Umigumo is someone who knows the city of Musutafu like the back of their hand— it's their job, after all. For thirty years, Umigumo has held the web of information taut beneath the weight of a thousand, *ten* thousand secrets of a city that boasts the highest villain activity of any in Japan.

Umigumo is ruthless, because that's how one survives in a world where information is power: a world where people will destroy the lives of anyone who knows their secrets. Umigumo knows that despite a missing limb, they got off far lighter than anyone else.

The heroes all say it, the civilians say it, the villains say it— it's something of a joke, that they can all agree on something like this. But everyone knows that the mafia was nothing but a farce, a scary story to tell the new villains on the streets. Until the mafia tore through their information web like wet paper, scattering their info brokers across the city— dead in the ditches, the waterways, in the dank corners of alleyways. A man who pulls people apart and demands to know where the Salamander hid his end of a deal.

Umigumo is thankful they have their life, if not their right hand.

The shelter hides the rest of them, unnoticeable among the refuse of society— but Umigumo has survived this far by *noticing* things.

And they notice Midoriya Izuku, because one remembers odd things in the middle of torture and watching your own hand fall to the grimy floor. And the way he looks at him, sunny and kind— it matches the smile in the picture that the mafia had waved in front of Umigumo. He will never forget it.

So Umigumo watches the boy, who hands out extra bread like it isn't coming from his pocket money, refills bowls just because he can't stand to see them stay hungry.

Uchizumi Umigumo is someone who has lived in a dark world for a very long time— they had always had serious doubts that the world could be kind, that it has the capacity to change.

But Midoriya Izuku makes them think that maybe, just maybe... the world could be *good* one day.

So when Izuku stumbles into the tent city Umigumo calls home, leaving heavily against a purple-haired boy Umigumo thinks they've seen before... they don't so much as blink at the blood, or the streaks of gore across his clothing. No, they just smile because Umigumo will do whatever it takes to get what they want out of this world— and they have a hunch that Izuku might be their best option.

Umigumo has seen children like Midoriya Izuku before, docile creatures a half-breath from carnage... from becoming a monstrosity. "I suppose you want your favour now, Izuku?"

The smile Izuku answers them with is sharp, and full of too many teeth. The potent, shifting gold of a claim mark is shining through the grime on his face, stretching with the grin. “I think so, Uchizumo-san.”

The boy at Izuku’s side goes a pale, wan shade in the light of Uchigumo’s campfire and they laugh, high and loud in the night.

In the shadows of the tent, Umigumo’s spiders spin webs of silk strung tight and thin— Midoriya Izuku is no longer a half-breath from carnage and Umigumo cannot wait to see the city *burn*.

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Far across the city, Yamada Hizashi walks into a house that smells like death in the night air and finds the death-cold corpse of Midoriya Inko and—

There is no sign of Midoriya Izuku, except for the blood footprints that trail out the door and onto the streets of Musutafu.

Hizashi weeps and once again ignores the gold glimmer of his patron in the corner of his gaze, he has had enough of the future—

The walls are *red*.



## Chapter End Notes

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# interlude, in a minor key

## Chapter Notes

Thank you to my wonderful friends [CalicoLynx](#) and RoadWild for the read throughs and betaing!

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## PREVIOUSLY

Far across the city, Yamada Hizashi walks into a house that smells like death in the night air and finds the death-cold corpse of Midoriya Inko and—

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Yamada Hizashi would give anything to have never known anything of the future. He's never told anyone, not his foster parents— Hizashi had been smart enough even then to know this was *exploitable*.

Everyone says they want to know the future: to know the lottery numbers, the person they would marry, whether it would rain on an important day. Hizashi supposes that those things would be good to know, if they were the *only* things you would see in the future.

Hizashi knows that Nemuri will die, haunted by the faces of children she couldn't save in time, the very moment he meets her. They shake hands, and the golden glimmer of Apollo lights up in his vision—Hizashi wears gloves for reasons other than aesthetics after all.

But the moment Hizashi meets Aizawa Shouta, he knows that this man is going to destroy his life.

Not in a way that is on purpose, but in the way that water drips onto stone and wears a path smooth. He sees fleeting, ephemeral glances of a life, contained in the universe forming between their hands, in every space they touch. Hizashi sees a life, of love and joy and the smell of coffee, a man who will fill Hizashi's life with colours he has never *dreamed* of—

And Hizashi sees a man who will die and with his passing, will take every colour from his world and leave it grey for the rest of his days.

It would be so easy to turn away from it all, Hizashi thinks... so very easy to stop caring, to detach from the world and from *caring* . If Hizashi was anyone other than who he *is* , he thinks he probably would have.

But Yamada Hizashi grows up in a family where he cannot detach—he is anchored into the world by metal and wire that digs into his jaw, drawn into the gravitational pull of children who *need him* . Even when he cries over their futures, with shaking shoulders in his childhood home, stifling his sobs against his hands, terrified to wake up their foster father.

He loses track over the years of how many futures Apollo throws into his mind— they litter his dreams: marriages, deaths, births, blood and tears and the laughter of small children. He touches the hand of a cashier, and sees the flashes of twisted metal, wrecked car lights blinking in the night. The cashier smiles back— Hizashi swallows down bile and tries to forget.

Hizashi would give anything to never know anything about the future.

And again, it crosses his mind as he steps across the threshold of the Midoriya apartment. The inside of the unit is a mess of torn plaster, furniture stained and shredded— something, *someone* has torn through this house like they were looking for something buried in the walls.

Or, Hizashi thinks as he treads softly into the wrecked bedroom of Midoriya Izuku, *someone*.

There is blood even here, smeared across the wall like someone has dragged blood fingerprints— panicked handprints across the door, and Hizashi can feel the terror in their imprints.

His own face stares from the bedspread, smiling— Hizashi wonders why Midoriya Izuku had trusted him this much, and had allowed what little faith, what little *trust* he had in heroes to rest on Hizashi's shoulders.

Hizashi wants to say that he has failed only a few people in his career, but the list of faces he can't unsee haunts his sleep. He has saved so many, that sometimes their faces blur together— but the faces of those Hizashi has *failed* ... they do not fade, no matter how bitterly he wishes they would.

An officer appears behind him, gloves white in gloom as he reaches past to switch a bedroom light on. Somehow, the sight before Hizashi does not improve with the starkness of the light. “Present Mic, sir... the detective sergeant wants to talk to you.”

The officer is hesitant at this elbow: Hizashi is one of the more approachable heroes, but he is still a hero and that comes with a certain level of distance when it comes to the police force. Hizashi is too tired to pull a smile across his face, and just nods. “I’ll meet him at the door then.”

He moves past the officer carefully, shoe covers squeaking on the polished tiles. Hizashi very purposefully averts his gaze from the wrecked lounge room— he’s had it burnt into his retinas for months now and he has no desire to give more fuel to his nightmares.

The detective sergeant meets him at the door, somewhat disheveled—it was a quick call out at this time of night and Hizashi knows they are all scrambling to pick up the slack.

He also knows there’s a dead mother and a missing teen on their watch now, and there’s no ‘picking up the slack’, no coming back from that now.

“Sergeant.”

The dark haired man turns to Hizashi, cheeks and nose reddened in the biting chill of the wind. He’s clutching at a cup of what Hizashi instantly recognises as coffee, the smell burning in his nose— it makes Hizashi ache for Shouta. He wants to go home and curl up with his husband, to *forget* .

But Hizashi has a job to do, one that he’s already failed once today

and he can't stand to have it happen again.

“Ah, Present Mic! Or should I call you—“

Hizashi is too tired for this. “Let's keep it professional, since we *are* at a crime scene Detective...?”

The man coughs, white plumes of his warm breath forming in the air. “Ah, of course, you're right. Detective Sergeant Osomada Tensai.”

Hizashi takes his outstretched hand, shaking it twice and releasing it so he can tuck his shaking hands away in his coat pockets. “I would say it's a pleasure to meet you, Osomada-buchou— but these are not pleasurable circumstances to meet in.”

Osomada grimaces in reply, tucking his hands tighter against his coffee cup. “No, not pleasant in the slightest. I'm assuming you've been informed of what happened to the officers we had stationed...”

Something drops in his stomach, and Hizashi digs his nails into the leather of his gloves. “No, I haven't.”

Osomada takes a gulp of his coffee, hands shaky. “A repetition of what you found in the lounge room— torn apart, clearly quirk related but... faster it seems.”

Hizashi curses low under his breath and raises a hand to rub at his forehead. He doesn't drink coffee on a regular basis, or at all really: but he craves something now, *anything* to relieve this tension behind his eyes. “Shit.”

“Yeah, that was our reaction as well. Explains why nobody called it in sooner, at least.” Osomada stares out across the open balcony-railing of the apartment complex: Hizashi can see the police car on the street, and the forensics team that is crowded around it. He can hear them behind him, the snap of cameras— Hizashi never wants to see those photos.

He will have to.

“What about the patrols?” Osomada murmurs, and Hizashi finds himself sighing. His vision is tinged with gold, and he grows ever more regretful of his younger self’s eagerness to be important to a god. He knows far too much of what it is to be *too* close to one’s patron.

Hizashi rubs tiredly at his eyes, and slumps forward against the railing. “I passed through at four pm, Razario came through at seven and I was coming through at... well, when I...”

Osomada nods, understanding. “No need to finish that thought, I get where you’re coming from. You said you were still patrolling?”

Hizashi shakes his head. “No, I was coming by to let the Midoriya family know that Hakamada-san had agreed to take his ward on permanently. They were instrumental in helping that come about, and I thought they would appreciate the good news. We hadn’t informed his ward yet...”

Hizashi remembers that they will need to tell Shinsou. Not only that Inko is dead— but that his closest friend is *gone* .

Hizashi realises that he has failed *three* people today and his mood

drops even further.

Osomada digs through his pockets, producing a cigarette carton. “You want one?”

Hizashi wants to say no— he hasn’t smoked in years, so hesitant to damage his quirk after his earlier years and the bad habits he had taken on. But Hizashi nods, and takes the offered cigarette with shaking hands.

Osomada lights up and hands the pocket zippo to Hizashi, and there’s something nostalgic, *relieving* in that first burning inhale. He feels both young, and a decade older in that moment.

Osomada exhales a pungent cloud and shakes his head, staring out across the darkened city line. “I wanted to make a difference in this city, y’know? I grew up on these streets, with the crime and the drugs and the parents who didn’t care... I just wanted it to be *better* . But,” Osomada taps the ash off on the railing. “It’s just the same old, shitty world.”

Hizashi can only nod, and exhale a shaky breath tainted with smoke, hazy in the cold.

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By the time Hizashi stumbles through his front door, it’s late— beyond late. It’s technically not his case, not his purview— but this was *his* failure and he was determined to see it through to the end. So he had stayed until the forensics were finished, until the detectives packed up shop: this was *Hizashi’s* mess, and he would stay until it was done.



The house should be dark: even if Shouta was awake, he liked to keep it dark to rest his eyes... but the kitchen lights are on, and so are the lounge room lamps. It's irrational— but fear courses through Hizashi's veins, leaving little room for anything else.

When he rounds the corner to the main space of their unit, Hizashi finds Shouta with his head resting in his hands at the kitchen bench. He looks up, gaze dark and lined in tired red. “Zashi?”

Hizashi sighs, relief sapping the last of his energy away. “Sho, why are you awake... or up?”

Shouta sighs, staring down at his phone where it rests on the bench. “Tsunagu called. Why are you so late?”

Hizashi sighs, and settles across from his husband. “Midoriya Inko was found dead, murdered. Midoriya Izuku is missing.”

Shouta's inhale whistles as he breathes in, and he rubs viciously at his sore eyes. “Shinsou Hitoshi is missing as well, at some time between seven pm and eight pm. Tsunagu went to collect him for dinner, and his window was open— go-bag was gone as well.”

Hizashi stares at the empty coffee cups in the sink. “Fuck.”

Shouta sighs, voice rough. “Fuck is right.”

There's nothing but the electric hum of the refrigerator to fill the silence that follows. Shouta stares down at the dark screen of his phone, Hizashi stares at the mess of their kitchen with the dull realisation they need to clean it, and they grapple with the

consequences of tonight.

“It was my fault.” Hizashi eventually murmurs into the stillness of their kitchen, staring down at where his hands are clenched. “I *promised* them, Sho... I promised they would be *safe*. ”

Shouta doesn't interrupt him: Hizashi knows that his husband is better than him on that front, because he would be champing at the bit to correct Shouta when he gets self-deprecating. But Shouta doesn't know when to stop, and Hizashi, for the most part, *does*.

“I feel *responsible*, Sho.” Hizashi feels miserable in this moment, now that combined numbness of the crime scene and the commute home through the cold have faded. This is the side of heroics nobody had told them about: the failures, the blood, the *bodies*.

“You feel responsible, but that's not logical Zashi. You did everything you could, everything that could be done and that's the end of it. You can't change it now.”

Most people would be turned away by Shouta's brand of comfort, Hizashi thinks. His husband is brutal, honest and up front in his words, just as he is with his actions. There's nothing to second guess, no layers to see through when Shouta lays a calloused hand across his and laces their fingers together. Everything Shouta does is what he *means*, and there is an intense *comfort* in knowing that.

Hizashi has spent his life second guessing the people around him, and spent his patrols on alert— but Shouta's natural aversion towards subterfuge allows Hizashi to trust him without fault.

Hizashi doesn't want to reply, and Shouta doesn't make him. They stumble, tired and sore, towards their room and Hizashi spends

precious effort to shed his uncomfortable jacket and pants. Energy depleted, he falls face first onto their mattress and feels familiar hands settle into his hair moments later.

“You want to tell me about today?”

Hizashi sights into the mattress and shifts around until they are both somewhat covered by their blankets. The chill is sending shivers up Hizashi’s legs. “Yeah, I do. Tell me about Tsunagu too?”

Hizashi can feel Shouta smiling, against his shoulder, but somehow even without seeing it: Hizashi knows it’s sad. “If you’d like.”

And as Shouta’s hands tangle in his hair, combing through the knots left by the wind, Hizashi mumbles out the hell his day had descended into. He tells his husband about the callers to the radio, about the art kids had sent to station, to his day-long happiness over hearing Shouta’s cousin had decided to take Shinsou on permanently.

Then, in halting pieces and with tears that Shouta kindly ignores, he tells his husband about finding the wreck of an apartment, about the blood left in handprints along the ruined walls, and the *smell* ... that too-sharp metallic smell that haunts him even here. The traces of some warped spiral of destruction that had torn through a house, a home, a *mother* — Hizashi sobs, finally, when he tells Shouta that somewhere out there is a teenager. An orphaned, traumatised child who knows that Hizashi had let his mother die, that his trust was misplaced.

And like Hizashi knew he would, Shouta lets him cry it out because that’s what Hizashi needs. It’s a well-worn pattern, long since perfected through practice. Ever since Oboro, they have done this—Hizashi needs to cry, and Shouta needs to be listened to. Once, a long time ago, there had been three ways to grieve, to comfort: someone who had talked to them, wound them down from the heights of grief

and anger.

But life has moved so far from the days on the school rooftop, and they are all that is left.

Hizashi doesn't keep track of how long he cries, but when he finally wipes his nose, he finds his chest open and empty of emotions. Hizashi shifts, and lets Shouta tuck into his side properly— a welcome warmth and weight.

Shouta sighs into the space between their faces and even in the dark, Hizashi can practically see the worried furrow of his brow. "You okay, love?"

Shouta just answers with yet another sigh, and then a muted, pleased noise as Hizashi sinks his fingers into dark hair. "No," comes the answer muttered against Hizashi's shoulder.

Hizashi chuckles, tired and empty even to his own ears. His hearing aids are still in, itching— he wants to take them out but he owes Shouta the space to be heard right now. "Would it help to talk to me about it?"

Shouta makes some incomprehensible noise against his shoulder.

"Sorry?"

Shouta groans and rolls to face the ceiling. "Yes."

Hizashi smiles, and blinks blearily as Shouta's phone lights up the darkness of the room. God, their room needs to be cleaned but Hizashi doesn't want to even *think* about that right now. "So..."

"Tsunagu called, just past eight and Zashi..." Shouta pauses, swallowing down some bitter emotion. "I've never heard him like that, and I don't like it. He's the only family I've got left, *blood* family at least and he hasn't been this happy in *years*...."

Shouta won't meet Hizashi's eyes, and he sighs. "There's something else?"

Shouta groans and presses his hands against his eyes. "I am angry at the kid, for making Tsunagu like this and it's *irrational*, because he's just a kid. But I am angry, and I'm angry at myself for that."

Hizashi sighs, and gets the urge to laugh at the expression on Shouta's face. It's not kind but he does snort, just a little and it transforms into a cackle as Shouta shoves at his shoulder.

"You can't just laugh, we were being serious Zashi!" His words would be harsh, Hizashi thinks, if Shouta wasn't clearly fighting against his own laughter— and losing.

Even after the laughter dies away, the feeling of relief persists— even with his own failures hanging around Hizashi's mind, the exhaustion of the worst parts of his career. They drift into sleep, together and secure in the knowledge that they are together in their regrets, that they will not wake up alone.

In a world where Hizashi knows it is never a guarantee he will see his husband again, that they face the likelihood of death whenever they step out in their uniforms— it is a comfort, to know they will have

this night.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

The bitter, acrid stench of bile and vomit fills the air as Eijirou stares after the fleeing back of his friend. The smell is directly contrasted by burning sugar and smoke, as Bakugou lets out a sound of *fury* .

Eijirou has never been one to be angry, not really. He's fiercely protective, and he wants to *help* : anger doesn't help him, so he's never focused on it. Eijirou found he vastly preferred to help others with their anger, to focus on his desire to improve the world than to be angry with it.

All that being said, Eijirou is *furious* .

As Izuku disappears out of the park, Bakugou goes to follow him—and Eijirou is having *none of that* . As quick as he can, he snags the edge of Bakugou's shirt and holds tight: not a moment too soon, as he goes to bolt after Izuku.

And as Bakugou rounds on Eijirou, vicious and wild: something in the back of his mind flinches away, wants to *run* — but there's no one else to help him right now. He wants to be a hero, wants to *help* ... and maybe helping right now boils down to stopping a bully from following a victim.

There's no one but Eijirou to do it.

He *has* to be enough.

So when Bakugou leans in, red eyes furious and mouth cut in a vicious snarl— Eijirou matches it with a smile filled with too many teeth. He tucks his fear as far down in his chest as he can, and lets fury boil up instead.

“Why the *fuck* are you touching me, asshole?” Bakugou flings the words at him like they are explosive— it’s a trait that seems to encompass his entire being. His hands are smoking, sparking: the smell of burnt sugar makes Eijirou want to gag.

“Because,” Eijirou preemptively hardens the skin of his hand, all too well aware of what Bakugou’s quirk can do to unprotected skin. He’s seen Izuku’s scars— the thought makes the anger in his chest boil hotter and hotter. “You’re a bully, and you’re gonna hurt someone I care about. Why *wouldn’t* I stop you?”

Bakugou scoffs and a hand that is hot, *scalding* clamps down on Eijirou’s wrist. He knows it would burn him, if Eijirou was unprepared

---

But Eijirou is going to be a hero, a *shield*... he can do this.

“How about you let me go, *extra* , and I don’t explode your wrists, huh?” Bakugou’s smile is *cruel* , and there is very little that Eijirou hates more than cruelty.

“You can *try* .”

The heat in Bakugou’s hands doesn’t fade— but he doesn’t ignite an explosion, because the park is *watching them* .

Eijirou *knows* bullies, knows how they operate best: in the shadows, away from adults and the judgement of others. Even someone like Bakugou, headstrong and violent, would hesitate here— it's too public, too many witnesses. And a public quirk usage charge rarely looks good on the record of a potential heroics student.

Eijirou hopes to the gods that Bakugou never makes it.

All Might might say that everyone could be a hero— it doesn't mean that everyone *should* .

Bakugou backs off with a guttural sound of anger, shaking the heat out of his hand with a scowl. “Why the fuck do you care about that nerd anyway. He’s godless—“

Eijirou frowns, lets go of his hold on Bakugou as he backs off and interrupts with considerably more anger than he had intended. “Quirkless? Is that what you were gonna say?”

Behind Bakugou’s head, Eijirou can see Hinata. She’s perched up on the slides, smiling, *laughing* — Eijirou cannot bear to think of his sister growing up with people like Bakugou. She is bright, annoying, full of questions and life, and there is no one Eijirou adores more in life—and he cannot help but think of the fear in Izuku’s eyes, the blankness of his face when he had seen Bakugou.

Eijirou wonders how many people grew up like Izuku, with no one who cared enough to help... and the terror that fills him when he thinks about Hinata living like that.

So if he’s angry at Bakugou, he thinks it’s warranted.



“So what if it was! He is quirkless, you shitty extra and he ain’t worth *nothing* .” Bakugou growls out, distaste colouring his words as he stares at his soiled shoes.

If Eijirou wasn’t also a prospective hero student, he thinks his fist would fit very well against Bakugou’s nose. But, he has a best friend to find... and he has to figure out how to ask his five year old sister if she was afraid of the kids at school.

So Eijirou turns away from the cursing blond to duck down to pull his shoes on and grabs Izuku’s from the base of their shade tree. They are the same bright red ones as that morning— Eijirou wonders why the colour makes him feel uneasy.

With them in his hands, he straightens and runs a hand through dark hair as he faces Bakugou. “I don’t have the patience to explain to you why you should *care about other people* , dude. Mess with Izuku again, and I will make it the *last* time you ever do it.”

Bakugou opens his stupid mouth, and Eijirou’s urge to toss his heroics careers down the drain grows impossibly stronger. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, Hinata appears at his side moments later. Her hair is a mess of curls and flyaway hairs, and she grins up at him brightly.

“Eiiii! Where is Izuku?”

Eijirou smiles back and ignores the way Bakugou is still standing there. “We’re gonna go find him! Are you ready to go?”

His sister eyes Bakugou. “Who’re you talkin to Ei? Did you make a

friend too? I met Maki-chan on the swing set!”

Eijirou keeps his smile up, and determinedly does not look at Bakugou. “Nobody, Hicchan, just someone who needed directions. Let’s go!”

Hinata turns to wave at Bakugou as they leave the park, and Eijirou can feel his angry gaze following them until they disappear from view. They walk towards home, slowly as Hinata stops to pet a dog and questions Eijirou on everything they pass. She asks about Bakugou, about why Eijirou has Izuku’s shoes and why Izuku ran: she goes on and on, non-stop.

The alleyway they pass smells heavily of sewage and trash, so Eijirou’s hurries Hinata past as she stops to look at a weed growing in the cracks of the pavement. This isn’t a nice part of town, and he hopes Izuku is okay.

And Eijirou finally finds the words for what he wants to ask, as they move past the alleyway and across the street toward home.  
“Hicchan?”

Hinata grins in response, swinging their joined hands happily. “Yeah?”

“Are... are the kids at school nice to you, Hicchan?”

Eijirou feels like something breaks in his heart, just a little bit, when his sister stops swinging their hands together. All of a sudden, she is *quiet* .

Izuku is quiet in the same way sometimes, like he has locked away

everything that makes him *Izuku* — like it is no longer safe to be himself. Eijirou had attributed it to his life, the way izuku had grown up: but now, Eijirou isn't quite sure that was the truth.

“Hicchan?” He prompts, unsure of how he's meant to handle this. It feels too big for him, to carry the idea that someone could be cruel to someone like Hinata— he wants his mothers here to do this.

But Eijirou is going to be a hero, so he will do this. As Izuku had once told him, the hardest things to do were usually the *right* things to do.

Hinata looks away, and Eijirou wasn't watching, he would've missed the way she shakes her head. “They don't like me, and they say stupid things... and the teacher doesn't do anything when I tell her!”

There's the unmistakable hitch in his sister's voice that tells Eijirou that she's going to cry, and he ducks down next to her just as she rubs at her wet eyes. “Hicchan, you gotta tell mum when these things happen! They aren't meant to be mean to you...”

Hinata just cries against his chest, and by the time Eijirou manages to carry her home, she's worn herself out. His mum eyes them, and the conspicuous absence of Izuku, with concern as they come through the door. Hinata quickly worms herself between their parents when Eijirou sets her down, and his ma's red eyes narrow at the tear tracks on her face.

“Ei—“

Eijirou is already back at the doorway, waving behind him. “I've gotta go look for Izuku, I promise I'll explain later! Hicchan, can you tell ma what you told me?”

His mother barely has time to reply before Eijirou is out the door, wondering where his friend has gotten to in his panic. He heads first for the shelter— but when Eijirou asks Makoto at the front whether Izuku has been by, she says she hasn't seen him since they had both left their shift.

The cafe is next, and Eijirou has just as little luck there— he hasn't been back since his weekly visit to see Hojicha. He's close to giving up when he hears an explosion, streets over— and Eijirou's mind is consumed by the fact that he had goaded, antagonised Izuku's bully with no thoughts to the consequences.

A bully who had nitroglycerin for sweat, and every reason to ignite it.

By the time the second explosion sounds out, Eijirou is racing towards it. There's something angry, terrified in the base of his stomach as he approaches the crowd growing in front of him— there are heroes, reporters...

And in the street is a monstrosity of green and grey, curled around the terrified face of Bakugou Katsuki. He is wild eyed, mouth wide and desperately trying to draw breath. But whatever this villain is made of, it surges down his throat like water and Bakugou is *drowning* .

But nobody moves— until Eijirou sees a dark blur of movement break out of the crowd, a familiar shade of green. Something cold grips his heart, missing a beat at sight.

Izuku stabs something into the gigantic eye.... and *oh* , that's their practice knife.

Something about the way the wood sinks into the flesh of the villain makes something drop, hollow and sick, in Eijirou's stomach.

So much happens in such a short space of time— the larger than life figure of All Might drops out of nowhere, the wind from one blow sending papers and rubbish from the street flying into the air.

A young child stumbles in the force of the blowback, no parent in sight and Eijirou cannot help but crouch down next to her to keep her stable. It takes his eyes off the scene in front of them for precious seconds and by the time Eijirou looks up once more, Izuku is nowhere to be seen.

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Eijirou trudges home in the aftermath, too tired and cold to continue his search for Izuku. Sunset is encroaching on the city, the streets and rough stone fences lit gold by its light. Night will soon be here, and Eijirou doesn't want to be out walking when it does.

Until he stops at a crossroad, and sees someone who could only be All Might leaning against a power pole. “Young man, you were at the incident earlier. May I ask you a question, young....?”

Eijirou tries to speak, but coughs on his own tongue instead. He coughs a few times and tries to act like it hasn't happened at all. “Ah, yes sir! Kirishima Eijirou!”

The hero, *his hero*, grins. “Why didn't you rush in, even though you so clearly wanted to, young Kirishima?”

Eijirou fidgets, not really sure how he's meant to reply. "I.... there was a kid, who couldn't stand up in the wind after you came in and I wanted to help her."

All Might eyes him curiously, smile still wide. "And that's what you want to do with your life, help people?"

Eijirou smiles, because that's it, he does just want to *help* , to do what's right— it's what he's always wanted to do. Heroes were people who helped, who saved and Eijirou has wanted to be one of them ever since he was little. He's always wanted to be like *All Might*. "More than anything, sir!"

All Might grins, and Eijirou feels like the air is charged with electricity: there is something important happening here, something bigger than just a meeting with the number one hero.

"How would you like to become the best hero there ever was, young Kirishima?"

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this brief foray into some alternate POVs, and a few little canon deviations!

Hey, I know All Might isn't written nicely in this— but please don't character bash in the comments. It just makes me sad and I have to spend time deleting them.

# vigilante arc part 1

## Chapter Notes

Major apologies for the late chapter, I ended up in hospital with my son for most of this week and only just managed to get this done this weekend!

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

(There is a minor timeskip here, and warnings for body horror and blood)

Come yell at me:

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[Tumblr](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

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“How would you like to become the best hero there ever was, young Kirishima?”

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It's a familiar scene, lit in the hazy hues of a memory.

Izuku wakes up all at once, his mind switching fully on with all the subtlety of a train crash— the instant his eyes flicker open, his mind is *awake* . He instantly, guiltily, envies Hitoshi as he slumbers away. He is half draped over Izuku, slumped against his backpack that both of them have used as makeshift pillow.

It wasn't the most comfortable option but...

Izuku's homeless now, technically. He knows it's not permanent, that Umigumo is working on it as the favour he owes Izuku— but Hitoshi's breath puffs cold in the morning air. The tent is freezing, and Izuku is keenly aware that they are rapidly approaching winter when the wind buffets against thin tent plastic.

And as Izuku stares up at the faded yellow of the tent, reality begins to settle into place around him.

His mother is dead.

It should be a sobering thought, a *grieving* thought— but all Izuku feels is a bone deep numbness. His chest feels ragged, empty— like someone has taken an ice cream scoop to the contents of his body and hollowed him. He is cold, in a way that has nothing to do with the winter chill or the fear that has set root in his bones.

Izuku has never had anything stable in his life, except for his mother. She had been there through *everything* : had understood his past, her past, *their past* in a way that nobody else could. Izuku could tell someone about the years of hiding behind doors and stepping between his parents, could describe to someone how flesh smelled when it burned and the reek of dead skin when burns became infected.



Izuku knows that if he tells Hitoshi, he will nod and comfort him, in that halting way Hitoshi does everything.

But his mother didn't need to be told, didn't need to have it explained: there had always been just the two of them against Hisashi, against the fire, against the *world* .

Now it is just Izuku.

He feels lonely in a way he doesn't know how to fight, how to shrug off because he has to think, to *plan*. But his mind instead drives along empty highways of thought, drifts between the concepts of being *alone* for the first time in his life and hazy, blood-soaked memories of his mother.

Izuku finds the road a lonely one, and when he looks over to where Hitoshi is laying, his eyes are open and lit gold by the sunrise. There is a grief to Hitoshi, it clings like a second skin— like water, it rests on the surface of his skin and there is nothing to draw it away.

And Izuku doesn't want to ask what grief this is— it could be the muted, red stained grief of someone who could've *loved* Hitoshi. Maybe Hitoshi is mourning a second chance, a life he wanted that Izuku has ripped him away from.

Maybe Hitoshi is grieving for Izuku, and Izuku doesn't think it's unwarranted. He's not Midoriya Izuku anymore, not in the ways that matter.

Midoriya Izuku is someone who laughs at his mother, dancing in their

kitchen—he feeds stray cats and sneaks extra toast to those who need it in the shelter.

Whoever he is now, he isn't Midoriya Izuku and he can never be again.

Regardless of what he mourns, Hitoshi meets his gaze with the same soft kindness he always has. Izuku wonders how anyone had ever thought Hitoshi a potential villain, when if they had looked just a little bit past his quirk, they would've seen a heart full of kindness.

Hitoshi just wants to do the right thing, and Izuku wants to tell him that— but there is no sound coming out of his mouth, and the air freezes in his lungs.

This, too, is familiar.

Between one breath and the empty space where the next should come but remains locked in Izuku's chest, there is a violent rush. He closes his eyes against the wind, against the swirling of wind and movement, the awful tearing of something made of flesh and bone—he opens them to a world dyed red.

It is familiar, and it is not: all in the same breath, Izuku sees the scenes that haunt him and the future he desperately hopes to unsee. Hitoshi is some wretched, decimated form: the walls are painted red, the air thick with bile and the stench of a stomach turned inside out into the air and *copper*. It hits his tongue with the tang of iron and rust, *so much blood that there is no way to survive it—*

Izuku wakes gasping for breath, lungs burning and the sensation of the

blanket trapping his legs. He flails, tugs at the fabric with frantic, panicked intakes of air that do nothing for his sleep-addled fear. His chest heaves, hands shaking in his urgency and some wounded, *terrified* noise leaves his throat when he can't seem to untangle his blanket from his legs.

He is trapped, unable breathe, he is *drowning*—

There's a hand on his shoulder moments, infinities, seconds after he wakes and Izuku cannot spare the energy to register who it is— only that is anchoring him deeper into the present. The touch drags him from the ocean of grey and green that fills his lungs, drives the oxygen from them and drowns him, slowly.

“Izuku, can you answer me?”

There's still no air in his lungs, nothing to wheeze out an answer and Izuku shakes his head, black spots at the edge of his vision. Hitoshi is there, he knows it's him, *trusts* Hitoshi because he is always there.

“I just need a sound, Izuku, just one and then I can help. You can do that, right?”

Izuku wheezes out something that might be a no— but the serenity of disconnection falls over him, so it must be enough. Izuku falls back into an endless ocean but he can *breathe* — he floats, in something weightless and warm. Between thoughts too hazy and too slippery to hold onto, Izuku drifts and feels his lungs inflating— oxygen courses through his veins and drives back the terror of suffocating surrounded by air.

It is addicting, to disconnect so completely from the pains of his body — the emptiness of his stomach, the chill of the winter biting into his

skin. It is equally as painful to suddenly snap back into a body that is bitterly cold and *hungry*— but at least Izuku is able to breathe now, and he takes a deep gulp of cold air just to remind himself he *can*.

“That dream again?”

Izuku winces, and Hitoshi sighs at the obvious answer. “I’m still here.”

Izuku sighs right back at him, falling back against their makeshift bed and burying his face into the pillow. Hitoshi tugs it from his grasp, and holds it away when Izuku reaches for it once again. “I just spent five minutes getting you to breathe, Izuku. Don’t undo my handiwork so quickly.”

“I’m not— I’m just hiding, Hitoshi,” Izuku grumbles back, before hiding his face in the remaining pillow. It’s a short-lived reprieve, as Hitoshi unceremoniously yanks it from underneath his face and takes the covers with it.

Cold air hits his toes, and it seemingly drives away the last of lingering sleep. The bare concrete walls of their ‘apartment’ greet him as he rolls over, awake enough now to register the dull grey light of the predawn twilight at the window. It’s a stretch to call this place an apartment or a home, but it’s far less depressing than calling it what it is: a warehouse that is barely waterproof and most definitely draughty.

But it’s *somewhere*, at least.

All things considered, Izuku thinks they are lucky to have a roof over their heads and the worst of the weather kept at bay. From the time with the shelter, Izuku knows there are far worse places they could’ve ended up and far worse outcomes than semi-legally squatting in an

abandoned warehouse.

Izuku stands up from the bed, wincing at the stretch of sore muscles and the cold floor on his feet. Hitoshi is already in the far corner of the converted office space, crouched down against one of the rusted locker cupboards. The space is the smallest of the old offices of the mezzanine, and Izuku thinks that once upon a time the level would've been quite lovely.

But time hasn't been kind to the steel industry, and whatever comfort this factory once had has been stripped over time. The carpets have been pulled up, power sockets and wires stripped for copper over time. It has been picked clean, everything not soldered to the floor looted and taken away. Izuku can't fault the people who did— why leave resources untapped, when they have been left to rot and stagnate just because a company no longer had use of the space?

So the concrete floors are bare, and by sheer luck they still have a door to this office space. The glass had been cracked when they first arrived, just barely together— someone had been through most of the complex and smashed most of the windows out for what Izuku can only think was amusement. So Hitoshi had taped them, the second day they had been here— carefully, slowly to prevent the glass from falling out and just like their lives, they had bound it together.

And like the taped window, Izuku just hopes their lives hold out against the winds.

“What have we got left?” Izuku grabs one of his only spare pairs of socks, close to worn through in places and pulls them on as he speaks. His body aches, still healing and protests at the movement.

“I'd tell you, but you won't like the answer,” comes the reply and Izuku wants to groan.

“If you say tuna—“

“Oh look here— tuna! And guess what?” Hitoshi holds up two faded yellow cans, deadpan. “More tuna.”

Izuku loses the fight on his composure, and groans into his hands. “Why do we always leave tuna until last? It always tastes awful and somehow dry.”

Hitoshi shrugs as he tosses one can to Izuku and seats himself on one of their milk crate chairs. “I don’t know, but that’s all we’ve got left.”

There’s a clear implication in the reply: it’s the last of their food, and Izuku’s well aware their cash funds are dwindling. Izuku knows he has a bank account, but accessing it means a paper trail, a digital footprint — and he knows someone is looking for him.

He’s seen the flyers, asking for information on his disappearance— knows that Present Mic has an entire morning segment on missing children’s cases on Fridays now. Izuku knows their names are the latest addition to the list, and hears it in snippets of the radio when they have batteries to work it.

Izuku cracks the pull tab of the tuna as he thinks, grimacing at the off-pink mush and the unavoidable stench of canned tuna as it invades his nose. It’s almost enough to make him gag, but regardless of how much Izuku hates it: it really is the last of their food and Izuku would prefer to force down dry canned fish than go hungry. Hitoshi is no stranger to hunger but the sensation of empty, gnawing belly is one Izuku has never truly experienced.

Izuku chokes down the fish in record time and it sits uneasy in the pit of his stomach. Hitoshi is still picking through the remnants of his tuna can, staring down into the silver can like it can answer whatever question is boiling over in his mind.

Izuku doesn't know how to ask, and he doesn't really need to. He's fairly sure Hitoshi is ruminating on the same thing Izuku is: the small box in the locker cupboard. A box with all of five hundred yen in it, and the sum total of their funds.

It's not enough, and they both know it.

So Izuku takes a seat on the milk crate next to Hitoshi, and he waits. But after long, silent minutes of Hitoshi picking at his food, it's clear to see that Hitoshi isn't going to be the one to say. So Izuku squares his shoulders and stares up at the ceiling, broken tiles and cracked metal.

"We don't have enough for food."

And just like that, it's out there. Izuku's words hang uselessly in the air— it's just a reality they've known was coming for a few days, but it feels heavier, more real now that Izuku's said it out loud. Unavoidable now that they've both acknowledged it.

Izuku can't see Hitoshi from this angle, as the light on the ceiling takes on the gold-blush of encroaching dawn. But the clink of the fork against metal stops, and Izuku hears the soft tap of the can as Hitoshi sets it down on the ground. There's that pervasive, uneasy silence that precedes all uncomfortable conversations.

And from the tension of Hitoshi's jaw when Izuku glances at him, he knows this is going to be one hell of an uncomfortable conversation.

“I don't think you should go out tonight, Izuku.”

Izuku doesn't answer, just averts his eyes and lets Hitoshi talk.

“You're in no shape to go out, and I...” Hitoshi swallows visibly, chewing on whatever words come next. “I really don't think this is good for you.”

It's worse, Izuku thinks, because Hitoshi is *right*. It's the worst thing they could be doing, and they've skirted around this conversation for almost a month now. There had been no time, in the days after his mother's death, to even consider the implications of what Izuku had promised.

And... Izuku had promised a lot. Too much, far more than he knows he can reasonably fulfill but a deal is a deal. There's no reneging on a deal with a god, and Izuku knows this— *Hitoshi* knows this.

Moreover, Izuku is tired of watching the city waste away. The police watch it, *contribute* to it, standing on the sidelines as vulnerable people disappear into the underbelly of the city and doing nothing. Musutafu is a city in a sinkhole, sliding into a pit from which there will be no returning.

Izuku sighs, and runs a hand through his greasy hair. It's not shower week, they can't frequent the shelters too much or they'll eventually catch on and they both know it. So they spread it out, switch between shelters as they need, and avoid any and all associated with the Kirishimas. Izuku isn't willing to risk being recognised by them— has no idea what danger he might bring them and he can't justify that. Even if the only thing he wants to do is to see Eijirou and be safe with them— Izuku knows they would keep him safe, accept him at a



moment's notice. He would be happy, *safe*.

But Izuku doesn't think his own personal safety is worth whatever Overhaul would bring down on them.

"I don't like it either... but Hitoshi, look at what heroes do for the city, for p-people like us." Izuku turns to meet hitoshi's gaze and does not avert it this time. "*Nothing*, Hitoshi. They do nothing. They leave us on the streets, in the ditches, in the garbage and barely any of them deign to look at us."

Hitoshi's lips purse, and he doesn't argue. It's not like Izuku's wrong after all: most of the heroes never delve into these streets, into the refuse lined tent cities. They patrol the well-trafficked streets, the rarified air of the business centres and market districts, and limelight heroes rarely if ever dirty their boots here.

Izuku's seen underground heroes, from time to time: crouched in the shadows, something like a gargoyle perched on the corners of buildings. They are something like wraiths, flickering between places — Izuku may not trust heroes, may never trust them again, but he has a respect for the underground heroes. At least they do *something*, which is more than Izuku can say for the hero that failed his mother.

It drives a sour note into his mind, and Izuku physically shakes the thought off like a dog shedding water from its coat. "I want to make a difference, even if I stop one person from being mugged I've done that. Hitoshi... aren't you tired of watching people get hurt?"

Hitoshi scowls at that, and jabs a finger in the direction of Izuku's ribs. "Yes, Izuku— I *am* tired of seeing people hurt, including your self-sacrificing ass!"

Izuku shifts and immediately winces as his ribs twinge, which lends no credibility to his argument. There's a spreading bruise across them, half healed and still tender when he moves— Hitoshi had been furious when he had first seen it. It was the worst of their arguments, and Izuku can still see fragments of that cold fury in Hitoshi's eyes now. "W-well, we can't just *not eat* ! What do you want to do instead of me going out, we need food or money— and neither of those things are going to materialise out of nothing!"

Hitoshi narrows his eyes at Izuku, and his hands are stuck in tight fists in his lap. "If you won't consider not going out, then I'm coming with you."

Izuku sighs and rubs at one gritty eye. "Hitoshi, you can b-barely handle a knife right now—"

"I've got brainwashing, that's enough—"

"Quirks aren't *enough* , Toshi!" Izuku snaps back, too tired of this argument to be worried about being so rude. "Brainwashing isn't going to help you when you get stabbed, and it's *distinctive*. It's valuable, Hitoshi—"

"And it could prevent *you* from getting stabbed, so I don't see the point of me staying here when I could at least be watching your back if nothing else. You've come back with bruises, but what about if you get something you can't just walk off? Just because you're a chosen, doesn't mean you don't need help."

Izuku hates that Hitoshi's logic makes sense and he scrubs a hand across his face, suddenly tired again. The curling serpents of his claim mark, golden and green across the expanse of his cheekbone itching at the thought. He scratches at the marked skin distractedly. "Hitoshi..."

Hitoshi is like a shark, following the slightest scent of blood in the water and he closes in on the waver in Izuku's resolve in seconds. "I can't just sit here, when I could be helping, Izuku. It's not *right* and I'm tired of watching you taking this all on yourself. You texted me because you knew I would have your back— so *let me have your back*."

And *damn it all* , Hitoshi is right: he's the only one Izuku's trusts implicitly, without thought. Izuku's current patrol schedule isn't going to hold up long— he's only one person and there's only so much he can do alone. They can survive off pilfered cash that Izuku manages to snag off villains he takes down but... Running in pairs is ideal, if Hitoshi can manage to keep up and Izuku knows that he likely can: the possibilities for takedowns are endless—

Izuku knows he's lost the argument when he realises he's already cooking up strategies to use Hitoshi's quirk in and presses his hands against his eyes to block out the dawn sunlight. "F-fine. You'd best get some extra sleep today then— it's a long night ahead."

Hitoshi grins, all teeth and it's a vicious thing. "I'm not sure I could sleep, with how wired up I am."

Izuku smiles despite himself, and moves off the crate to chuck his can into their designated rubbish bin. "Well, *I* am gonna crash back into bed and actually sleep this time."

He locates the pillows Hitoshi had stolen earlier, dumping them back on the bed and sitting on the edge to divest himself of his socks. Before he turns to get under the blanket, Izuku waves to catch Hitoshi's attention and smiles when he does. "Thank you, for before with the panic and *everything* . Appreciate it."

Hitoshi smiles softly, light up by the pink-blush of dawn through the window and Izuku can't help but think it's a beautiful sight. "No thanks needed Izuku— I'm always here to help."

Izuku wills the flush of his cheeks down and hides under the blankets. It should be unfair, that something beautiful exists in Izuku's world after his mother's death: but if Hitoshi is the only beautiful thing left... Izuku thinks he can live with that.

..✧□□□□□□ ☾ □□□□□□ ✧..

Dusk finds them preparing: perhaps it's more apt to say that Izuku prepares and Hitoshi stares impatiently. They don't have equipment, as such— Izuku makes sure the battery-powered flashlight is working and bright before he tucks it away in his pockets and secures the wooden practice knife that still vaguely reeks of sewage into the makeshift holder of his hoodie.

They look less like vigilantes like this, dressed in hoodies and the darkest colours they've managed to pick up over the last month, and far more like shady drug dealers. Izuku thinks that might actually be more of a help than a hindrance, considering the neighbourhood demographic.

"You ready to go?"

Izuku thinks that for all his enthusiasm, the seriousness has finally hit Hitoshi because he just nods in reply, hands tucked away in the pockets of his hoodie. He's strung a black medical mask across his face, hair tied back and hidden in the depths of his hood.

Izuku reaches for the last of his gear, and traces his fingers across the

white-bone mask and it's winding serpent designs. It's bitterly cold to the touch, and Izuku shivers at the sensation. It's not something they've made or found: Izuku had found it, perched on the white rocks of the altar the last time and the bone reeks so strongly of something not of this world. It makes his nose itchy, but he pulls it on regardless.

It's a gift from a deity, and Izuku's not particularly keen on annoying his patron by rejecting it and it conveniently obscured his face.

They descend in relative silence down the concrete stairwell that connects the ground floor and the mezzanine floor, only the scuff of their shoes echoing in the confined space. The sky only grows darker around them as Izuku leads them into the city, the blare of car horns and the night life of the city slowly waking up around them.

The buildings here are close together, packed in like sardines and once they get to the rooftops, it's a much quicker route. Izuku shows Hitoshi each of his half-memorised paths he takes, somewhat established in the two months or so they've been in the area. Umigumo had found the furthest place he could from their home district, and while it had made navigation a pain, it kept them hidden from the scrutiny of the police and heroes alike.

It doesn't take them long to find something— a shout arises from a nearby alleyway and Izuku stops, grabbing Hitoshi's arm to pull him to a halt in the same moment. He turns, and pulls them to the building edge, peering down into the alleyway to assess the scene.

It's a woman, backed into the corner of the dead end gap between the buildings by what Izuku can only assume is a villain. There's the glint of metal in the reflection of the streetlights as the villain haphazardly waves a knife in the direction of the terrified woman. It's a classic mugging, and Izuku lets out a heavy sigh.

Hitoshi is hunkered down next to him, peering over the edge as well and he waits as Izuku formulates a plan.

“Hitoshi, there should be another fire escape closer to the entrance of the alleyway— get down as quickly and as quietly as possible. Jump in whenever you get a chance, and stay out of range of the knife.”

Hitoshi nods and with a quick squeeze of Izuku’s hands, takes off towards the front of the building. Izuku takes the memory of Hitoshi’s warm hand against his, and tucks it away as he makes his way down the rear fire escape into the alley. He’s less than subtle about it, the clatter of the metal stairs alerting the villain to his presence just as Izuku hits the ground behind him.

The man whirls around, the blade moving through the air and Izuku dodges purely on instinct, the sharp edge just passing by his face. He should be at disadvantage in almost all aspects here— he’s smaller, lighter and he’s not armed with a live blade.

Except all of these things render him able to fight *better* , more so than hindering him,

Izuku ducks that strike and leans back against the wall to let it pass over him, ignoring the laboured cursing of the villain and purely focused on the blade. Izuku can tell the man has it mostly for intimidation— his wrists are loose, *too loose* , and his arcing swipes tell of little-to-no actual knife skills. As the villain steps forward to swing, Izuku ducks under the slashing movement and jams an elbow into his solar plexus with all the force of his hips and shoulders.

He’s out of reach seconds later— or he should’ve been, as one large hand latches in his arm and Izuku swears viciously at the painfully tight grip.

“You little shit what the fuck do you think you’re doing?” The villain’s breath reeks of cigarette smoke and booze as he leans into eye Izuku. Behind his broad frame, Izuku sees the woman make a break for the open streets and sighs in relief.

“Oi ugly, how’s your life insurance policy?”

Izuku has to stifle a laugh at that, but the villain whips around to the entrance of the alleyway at the sudden voice. “What the fuck did you —“

“Let him go, and sit on the ground with your hands behind your back,” comes Hitoshi’s command and Izuku sighs as the bruise-tight grip releases from his arm. He immediately starts rifling through his side back for the small length of rope Izuku keeps for capturing. He loops it, once and then twice around the man’s wrists and after a quick tug, deems it enough.

The villain’s vocabulary is just as colourful when he comes out of the brainwash, and Izuku crouches down to meet him eye to eye. “I’d say it was nice to make your acquaintance but that w-would be a lie. So let’s get this over and done with: where is Overhaul?”

There’s nothing but confusion in the man’s eyes, and Izuku sighs. “D-don’t answer that, I can already tell. Now— make sure you let them know Fenrir sent you, yeah?” The man collapses like a sack of potatoes moments later, the blunt butt of Izuku’s knife leaving a rounded red mark on the back of his head.

Izuku turns to Hitoshi, eager to congratulate him on his first successful villain encounter but he’s cut short. There’s a man standing in the shadows of the alley, something white across his shoulders and bright

even in the gloom.

“I feel like I should remind you that vigilantism is illegal, but you’ve made my job easier tonight.”

Izuku sighs at the familiar voice, and tucks the knife back into the makeshift sheath as he turns to face the somewhat familiar figure. He pitches his voice down just a little, and wills the stammer out of his voice.

“Good evening, Eraserhead.”

## Chapter End Notes

\*hell Elmo gif here\* the dadzawa arrives

Hope you enjoyed it, let me know what you thought!

Reminder that if you haven’t followed the series yet, do that! I’m going to be posting some world building materials there for this AU, small snippets or unused scenes!



# vigilante arc part 2

## Chapter Notes

**\*\*hides under a rock\*\***

well, uh... this is awkward.

Hi y'all it's been like a year and a half since I posted and I am so dang sorry. Life got real hectic with some major medical issues, family and just the state of the world and cancer brain sucks at writing

but behold, a chapter comes and we can continue our wonderful adventures together! Right now, I have no promises on a posting schedule but this is a start!

Thank you to my wonderful friends [CalicoLynx](#) and [RoadWild](#) for the read throughs and betaing!

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## PREVIOUSLY

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Izuku has no idea how long the underground hero has been crouched in the shadows of the alley but he desperately hopes it wasn't long. He shifts, ever so slowly, towards Hitoshi, eyes never leaving the hero in the shadows.

Eraserhead steps forward out of the shadows on silent feet, his goggles pushed up to his hairline and lower face buried in the scarf around his neck. “You're not alone tonight.”

Izuku very carefully does not look back at Hitoshi, who he can feel shivering with what must be a mix of fear and adrenaline. Instead, he continues to zip up the side pack with his supplies with one hand—the other free and ready to move. “No.”

Eraserhead doesn't blink at the short answer, just tilts his head a little like he's trying to look closer at both of them. “You've never had anyone with you before.”

Izuku rolls his eyes behind the mask and brings both hands to the front, empty but ready should the hero make a move. He trusts underground heroes minutely more than he does limelight heroes—but he doesn't trust him enough to be safe around him. He's been failed by one too many people, too many heroes to not recognize that even good heroes were flawed. “Can't always work alone,” Izuku points out.

“So I can see,” Eraserhead says, eyeing them with a keen curiosity

hidden behind apathy. “Are you going to introduce me, Fenrir?”

Izuku bares his teeth behind the mask, grits them against each other with the force of it. “No.”

There’s the sound of sirens, a caterwauling call that bounces off the high brick walls of the alley. It sends ice down Izuku’s spine, submerging him in panic and he can feel Hitoshi growing stiffer by the moment, far less attuned to the sound and how to hold back the instinctive stress response to flee.

Aizawa’s gaze shifts between them, dark and almost unreadable in the intermittent light of a flickering streetlight, dim already with the distance from the street. The gray-white of the fabric across his shoulders seems to glow in the dim. “You know,” he begins, almost conversational, “you’re going to run into someone else of my kind soon enough, and they’re not going to be as lenient.”

Izuku shifts his feet, rough against the concrete and he knows it’s obvious, knows the motion would throw anyone into focus mode—but he’s actually smack bang out of other moves right now. Eraserhead is no fool, and Izuku’s never been fool enough to think he is. “Good thing we don’t actually tend to run into your kind,” he points out. He can hear Hitoshi shifting his weight nervously on the concrete, the grinding of a rock under boot-heel louder than it should be in the alleyway. It sets his own nerves on edge.

“Useful,” the older man remarks, neutral and plain, eyes dark in the shadows of the walls rising high around them. They still need to climb them. They still need to get up. They still need to buy food, find more money. Izuku is running out of time and the sirens are calling loudly in the streets around them. “But it doesn’t seem like your friend knows that.”

Hitoshi’s hands are trembling and Izuku can see it, chalking it up to adrenaline but he knows there’s fear there too. “He’ll learn,” he says, short and steady. “Plenty of incompetent heroes who swing too slow,

and plenty of heroes who just don't care."

The man at the end of the alley snorts, gruff and low and amused it sounds like. The air is damp and the sound is thick in the air, carrying odd in night. Eraserhead's amusement might as well be a censure and a compliment all rolled into one, and the sound is not one that eases his nerves. He can hear sirens in the night, wailing in asphalt labyrinths, drawing closer and closer and the world is shrinking with every echo of the noise on the concrete of the alleyway. There's a ladder up to the scaffolding stairs, and Izuku doesn't know if Hitoshi can move fast enough for it, or scale it quick enough to be worth the effort.

Eraserhead has never tried to nab him before, but Izuku knows the presence of someone else with him is different, a deviation and might be enough to pull legality over the tenuous balance between vigilantes and the underground heroes who poked their noses into dark, dirty streets and old blood on concrete.

He's hoping it's not enough, shifting ever so slightly on his feet to watch him, to give Hitoshi space to move behind and thank the gods, he does, shifting on his feet towards the ladder, quiet and slow.

Eraserhead laughs at him, just a little gruff noise and Izuku wants to bite at it. "Anything you want?" he snaps out, not vicious but blunt, as far from Izuku as he can manage to be.

(And Izuku has become so good at not being himself, in the months of cold and quiet since the world went red)

"Gonna cut patrols here," Eraserhead offers after a very long, very pregnant pause that has Izuku growing more and more tense with every moment that passes. "New guy isn't old school. I'd cut ties."

It takes Izuku a moment to compute, and several moments longer to stare up after the man as he takes the opportunity to abscond back to darkness he'd appeared out of in the first place and another moment for him to step back, scanning the dark alleyway and the foggy light of the flickering street light at the end of the street.

Hitoshi is peering owlishly back at him from the shadows of his hood and over the mask, seemingly as perturbed as Izuku feels, Eraserhead

a faint hint of steel-shaving-iron lingering in air and Izuku doesn't know what to say.

It feels fitting, for Izuku's life, that he turns and flees up the scaffold ladder himself, the flicker of the streetlamps almost the cadence of his heart jackhammering in his chest.

(And it's comforting and *terrifying* that Hitoshi is on his heels without a word.)

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They take the long way back, or at least it's Izuku's long way back. It's over rooftops, down scaffolds and up ladders, meandering almost but it's hard to follow unless someone is intent on following them down into the murk of downtown. It's no well-worn pattern—Izuku knows well-worn patterns are just another word for habits that form pathways and pathways can be *watched*, and can be *lethal* if someone decides to wait in them. So he tracks semi-familiar landmarks, foggily reminiscent of using the shapes of trees and rocks craggy near the old abandoned building site, past childhood haunts and the dry riverbed and the patch of grass Izuku thinks must still be growing well on dry blood.

He's starting to get to know the stone of the city as well as he did every twist and turn of a dirt path trampled by would-be-heroes in days that won't ever come back.

It shouldn't feel like grief.

But they take the long way home regardless, for all Hitoshi might not know that's what they're doing. Izuku doesn't want to ping on Eraserhead's radar anymore tonight, eyes flickering to every howling dog startled into sound but nothing comes near them and it's an hour, maybe more that they slip through the loose tilting window at the side of the building and sort of... crumple into the bed, side by side and Hitoshi's breath is coming fast like he's run a marathon. Izuku dazedly notes that he really should make Hitoshi run more, since he's way too reliant on his quirk and he thinks that's going to get them hurt if it continues.

He doesn't say as much right now, as they stare up into the dark of their barely-powered, barely functional, mold encrusted home and

catch their breath. Izuku thinks his mother would go ballistic at the mere sight of the black mold in the corners of their warehouse.

Hitoshi calls it the hovel.

Izuku thinks it has a good ring to it, if he's honest.

Hitoshi catches his breath just when Izuku's heart has stopped its rabbit impression and the bed beneath him feels less like the sea in November and more like the thin layer of foam on concrete that it actually is. He opens his mouth to ask if Hitoshi is okay and the first question Hitoshi gets out answers that question for him.

"Do you think he hates me?"

Izuku makes a tired, half muffled noise as he rolls onto his stomach to watch him. "Eraserhead?"

"Yeah."

Izuku is quiet, and he can barely see Hitoshi in the gloom. Words are always harder in the light, and Hitoshi sometimes only seems to have the truth and his own words in his hands when nobody can see him, cloaked in the witching hour dark.

"I don't know," is all he can say.

"I left Hakamada alone, just when he was happy, I think. I don't know if Eraserhead would be mad at me for it."

Izuku lets the word sit as long as they need to, for both of them to hear it. He doesn't really know what to say, when he cannot pour out the *guilt* at Hitoshi's quiet upset. This is his fault, and his cheek itches like gold dust is heating in the sun. "I-" he starts, quiet and unsure.

"I'm not going back," comes Hitoshi's abrupt and firm words in reply. "I don't want to go back. I'm not going, so just-"

*Stop.*

Izuku hears it, and he lets his face hit the thin blanket under his body. He's not ready for that, so he takes the way out like he always does. "Why do you think Eraserhead would be upset that you left the hero he bunked you in with?" he asks instead, quiet and muffled.

“Cause Ts- Hakamada has a picture of him in his office,” Hitoshi admits, quiet and tired. “Out of uniform, and heroes generally don’t do that, I don’t think.”

Izuku considers it, quiet and tired and he shouldn’t be as relieved still by Hitoshi’s words that he will *stay*. He still is, and his cheek itches hotter even when he shifts the mask up to rub at it.

“It doesn’t really... matter, I guess,” Hitoshi adds to the silence when Izuku is caught still in his own head.

“I don’t think Eraserhead would hate you,” Izuku admits, quiet as he takes the pause as the given space to reply and not just a thoughtful pause. “Doesn’t really seem like his shit, y’know, to hold grudges or things like that.”

Hitoshi is quiet, in the dark and the dim and the warehouse smells like wet and mold and Izuku thinks he fucked up more on Hitoshi’s behalf than anyone else’s. He should probably regret it more, should take notes from the flagellants and beat himself up a little more about it.

But Hitoshi’s hand taps his, silent for a moment and Izuku is guilty, awfully guilt but he is no longer alone, no longer caught between the red of the world in the aftermath and the gold-serpentine sibilant hiss of a god he has yet to understand, to trust, to find the same warmth and love his father had once held for the soft rock of altar in their living room, before the world began to smell of sulfur and smoke.

“Thanks,” Hitoshi says into the dark and then rolls over, seemingly content to stare into the dark all on his lonesome and Izuku can’t begrudge him that, when it’s Izuku’s favourite nighttime activity too.

“Do you wanna go see the cats tomorrow?” Izuku asks, after a long moment, just before he can hear his friend’s breathing begin to relax into sleep, a little olive branch for a grief he thinks his friend won’t let him touch even enough to know it is there.

He’s treated to a sleep-thick snort, and an-almost gentle kick to his foot from his bedmate. “Duh,” is the reply he gets and Izuku wants to laugh with it, before he realises Hitoshi is already out like a light.

He just snorts to himself and tucks their blanket over the two of them as he rolls to the opposite side to sleep.

(They wake up tangled anyway, pale flushed cheeks and even a good solid ablution break barely dims the warmth in their cheeks)



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